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MARVEL'S MIRTHFUL MUTANT MAG!

#56

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

CHRIS CLAREMONT
ON THE COSMIC COMEDY CAPER

CARTOOONISTS
ORSAK & PEYER
ON CAPTAIN 'CUSE

BATMAN ARTIST —
JERRY ROBINSON
ON THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS!

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH SUPERHEROES?
(Nothing That Can't Be Fixed)

The original superhero concept was basic — the characters were designed not to have personalities but to symbolically represent something distinct. Superman was moral strength; Batman was righteous indignation, Captain America was American ideology. It was simple and worked for the times, though nowadays seems hackneyed.

Then, in the '60s, **Stan Lee** hit on a new twist, a complex symbol. He discovered characterization, which previously had been ignored, occurring only as an outgrowth of each character's symbolic position. In effect, he created superheroes whose symbolism rested in their characterization. The Fantastic Four — being symbolic of the family unit — required characterization to work; Spider-Man — being symbolic of the life experience, in general — was entirely premised in characterization.

In short, he came up with a fuller realization of the superhero concept, which worked both on the basic symbolic level and as something to which the reader could also personally relate.

Today, characterization has grown beyond the complex symbolism of **Stan Lee**, in many cases has totally supplanted the very idea of symbolism. What creators concentrate on and strive for is the character as a fully-realized individual, as near to really human as a fictional character can be. They are content to ignore the symbolism of the superhero (which is there anyway because it is integral to the concept), shooting instead for a characterization ideal. This creates a dichotomy where the characters go in two directions at once — both towards the ideal character and in the symbolic direction. Most characters fall short of the ideal because of that dichotomy; the creators are trying to have the fully realized character at the expense of the symbolism when they should be trying for it *via* the symbolism.

The Symbol is integral to the superhero — the ideal character won't happen by going around it.

— Darrel L. Boatz
Associate Editor

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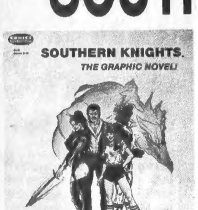

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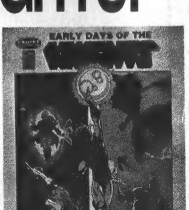

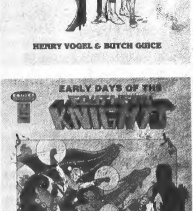

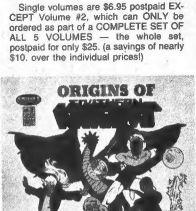

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"I don't think my stuff is as popular as it should be."

CHRIS CLAREMONT

Who now remembers what mutants were before they came into their own? Do we recall that once they were but a peripheral reprint title, a smattering of lesser characters, and the vast hordes of dripping misshapen monstrosities that plagued the pure of body in the stead of demons and vampires? Indeed, the younger among us know little of such, and why should they. Not only has the mutant risen to the point where now, together with Stan Lee's nonmutant characters and not much else, they virtually define the Marvel Universe, but the fallout has spread over the graphic story medium in a diverse and mutine manner; so we have not only X-MEN and NEW MUTANTS and FALLEN ANGELS, but EX-MUTANTS and POWER FACTOR and X-THIEVES as well.

It is not so much a fact of mutation which has taken hold these days, it is a more elusive something else, and this is not the place to dwell and ponder on that, for there is not the space. But it takes little work to acknowledge that one man has been at the center of this movement, Chris Claremont; and if here the answer is not to be found, and the question is left asking, perhaps here be clues . . .

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"The idea is anything goes, no concept

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL: *Let's start with EXCALIBUR. Why this set of characters, and why now?*

CHRIS CLAREMONT: I suppose the basic answer would be, "Why not?" *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *You get an "A" in your philosophy course.*

CHRIS: It's primarily that the X-Men canon has grown to such an extent that there simply isn't enough room in THE X-MEN for all of the characters, the primary characters associated with the team. The current roster is eight or nine characters counting Gateway, if we throw in Kitty and Nightcrawler that's eleven, and that's too many for any single book if you want to be able to engage in anything more than superficial characteristics. The precedent, I suppose, has already been established with X-FACTOR taking the original X-Men and spinning them off into their own series.

And I had been wanting for a long time to work with **Alan Davis** on a regular basis, and this seemed like a possible way of fulfilling that ambition; taking characters from the Captain Britain canon, namely Captain Britain and his girlfriend Meggan, plus these three X-Men who were at loose ends, Kitty and Nightcrawler and Rachel, and spinning them off into a book that would hopefully speak to a style of story, of writing, an *attitude* if you will, that hasn't been seen in THE X-MEN too much of late; namely, for want of a better term, a more humorous approach.

One of the nice things about THE X-MEN when Dave and I started on it was there was a lot of emotional angst and intensity and drama and melodrama, but there was *also* more than a little humor and so you had a fairly nice balance. Over the years a lot of people have felt that the books have swung rather excessively towards the dramatic side and have lost a lot of the sparkle and the humor that attracted them to it, or was part of what attracted them to it. So while in THE X-MEN itself we're trying to restore something of that balance, we felt EX-CALIBUR was a way to approach the series from a different perspective; instead of a drama book with comedic light touches now and then, to try one that was more comedic in tone, say on the order of the new TV concepts they're calling "dramedy."

PAT: *Yes.*

CHRIS: Things like HOOPERMAN and SLAP MAXWELL and such. You'll have the traditional death-defying high adventures and world-class villains, but at the same time it's a book where things are skewed, they are strange. You'll have villains, I guess, with a sense of humor, or a sense of the absurd if nothing else. It's sort of like — not quite *that* absurd — but a MONTY PYTHON spin on superheroics, with the Excalibur team regrettably pretty much as the straight men, playing **Margaret Dumont** to all of these **Marx Brothers** characters running around.

PAT: *You mention MONTY PYTHON. British humor . . . is that partly a reflection both of Alan Davis being British and your own sort of Anglophiliac intentions?*

CHRIS: Well . . . I mean I was born there

BETSY AND THE X-MEN WERE HALF-A-WORLD AWAY. HOW COULD YOU HAVE POSSIBLY KNOWN SHE WAS IN DANGER?!
THAT'S THE POINT! WHAT THE BLAZES USE AM I IF I DON'T KNOW SUCH THINGS?!
BRIAN, SHE WAS A BROWN WOMAN.
SHE CHOSE HER LIFE-- SHE'S RESPONSIBLE FOR HER DECISIONS AND HER DEEDS--
--YOU'RE NOT TO BLAME.

too silly, no joke too embarrassing."

but my upbringing was fundamentally American, so the perspective I bring to a series would be as American. I assume, as anyone else's who is writing today on this side of the water. On the other hand there is a substantial difference in approach and attitude between the British comics and the American comics. There's a much harsher and harder edge to the writing in British comics, in the sense that it's a lot more bitingly and overtly satirical than we allow ourselves to be. I suppose it's similar to the difference between their politics and ours. What in America passes for leftist would in Britain probably be considered marginally conservative, and what passes for left over there we'd probably throw in jail over here in ten seconds. *(Pause.)* I suppose you temper it. The rule of thumb over here is that I have absolutely no sense of humor whatsoever, so you put me in tandem with someone like Alan who can have a very devastating one, visual and otherwise, and the idea is to create a synthesis where I can set up dramatic situations and then he can put a totally wild tilt to them. For example in the third issue where Juggernaut has busted out of prison, he lays waste to every force that goes against him, including Captain Britain, until finally when it looks like he's out of it he just walks right into Phoenix and she just knocks him right out since he's not wearing his helmet to protect him from telepathic attack. On the surface that's a very dramatic sequence of events, and yet the way Alan deals with it has, I think, some real laughs in it. I'm not saying that we're looking at this as like the superhero version of CALVIN AND HOBBS. *(Laughter.)* But it's not WAR AND PEACE either.

PAT: *Captain Britain is a pretty unknown quantity here in the States.*

CHRIS: He's a pretty unknown quantity in Britain, too. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *What have you done to try and introduce him and his milieu, if you will, to the American audience, without a Captain Britain primer, as it were, stuck in the middle of EXCALIBUR?*

CHRIS: Well, very realistically, virtually nothing. In a sense we're doing no more with this per se than we did to introduce the others. It's like, "Here are these five characters, they have a history but we'll tell it to you as we go along, so for the moment just take them at face value." We're not giving origins per se on *anybody.* It's clear from the context that Captain Britain feels he has a certain status over in England, and at some point in the future we may indeed go into it, but at the moment I just want to get the series up and running. Most of the resonances that have occurred all relate to what has happened with the X-Men. So there's no real attempt to go, "This is Captain Britain's origin, this is Meggan's origin, this is Rachel's origin, this is Kitty's origin, this is Kurt's origin." It's like, "Here we go, we're throwing you in, you'll sink or swim on your own." Don't worry, readers, we'll explain it as we go along, Injun Scout's honor and all that stuff.

We essentially treat all of the characters we introduce, whether American or English — except for somebody like Juggernaut, though even possibly him — as if nobody's ever seen them before. In the case of the Captain Britain characters that may well be true. So we introduce them. You treat them as if this is their debut issue, and you take it from there. But, again, this is kind of going back to the old days on THE X-MEN where we *didn't* explain everything, we just did it and had as good a time as we could. And I think this *possibly* is an outgrowth of the change in regimes at Marvel, a book where our goal is not to create the perfect comic, our goal is to have a cracking good time and amuse ourselves wildly for 22 pages, and figure that that will carry over to the reader.

PAT: *Closer to the style that Marvel tended to have in the mid to late '60s.*

CHRIS: The style that I had when I started on THE X-MEN, yeah. Hopefully we're creating a book where the idea is anything goes, no concept too silly, no joke too embarrassing. And hopefully the readers will feel that they're getting their money's worth — God knows Marvel's charging them enough for it. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *Do you as a writer ever long for the days, perhaps, when a book could stand or fall on its own merits, within its own self, without having to be connected to all*

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"It's a book where things are skewed, they are strange."

of the rest of the continuity that surrounds it in the publisher's world?

CHRIS: When did that ever exist? Any book that has "Marvel" on the cover benefits from the Marvel Universe, whether it's the sixth, twelfth, fifteenth SPIDER-MAN book or something as off the wall as KILLRAVEN which was not linked with the continuity at all. The logo up in the top left corner, the phrase **"Stan Lee** presents," automatically pulls it into that milieu, the same way as the DC logo ties in any book in the DC Universe, to the company per se.

And if you mean do I long for the days when there wasn't a thousand spin-offs on every character, again it depends on which side of the street you're on. I could look back to the early '60s, 25 years — Jesus, what a concept — and what, you had SUPERMAN and ACTION and ADVENTURE and SUPERBOY and WORLD'S FINEST and LOIS LANE and JIMMY OLSEN and JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA; Superman was in like a half-dozen to a dozen books a month because DC figured they could get away with it. Now in a sense the shoe is on the other foot and Marvel for various reasons feels that it can justify four Spider-Man orientated titles a month and, God, nine X-Men titles. *That* I think is the natural way of things whether you're talking Marvel or DC or even MTM. I mean MARY TYLER MOORE begat RHODA, begat PHYLLIS, begat LOU GRANT, so you had spin-offs of virtually every major character on THE MARY TYLER MOORE SHOW — and then you had scenes where characters from MARY TYLER MOORE would show up in LOU GRANT. M*A*S*H begat TRAPPER JOHN, begat AFTER M*A*S*H.

I think there's a tendency to exploit, to carry on with something that is successful. It's natural to media, not simply comics. So it doesn't really bother me. Well, let me rephrase that: It bothers me in the sense that I worry about saturation. I worry that at some point we're going to hit a level where people just say, "Enough already!" and decide not to buy the books, or the X-Men books; which doesn't seem to have happened yet. More importantly, from *my* perspective, we'll hit a point where the creative staff isn't capable of handling the work load. At the moment virtually all of the core X-Men books are *written* by me and Weezie and produced by me and whoever I'm working with and by Weezie and whoever she's working with, including Walter. That gives the canon, so to speak, a tremendous cohesion. Originally it was all out of my head

and now it's all out of my head and her head.

At some point if this expansion goes on there will be a necessity, simply because there's a limit to how much people can do, it's inevitable that perhaps less talented or less qualified people might start writing the books. And if that happens, if the quality of the books suffers, if the perception of the books is that they are just becoming run of the mill rather than the exceptional titles they generally seem to

be, who knows what kind of effect that could have. Again, if the Superman titles of the early '60s had all been like top-notch work, who can say if the industry would have declined as precipitously.

PAT: *I see your point.*

CHRIS: A fundamental difference, though, is that the Superman titles were split between three separate editors with totally distinct styles; **Joe Orlando, Mort Weisinger,** and **Murray Boltinoff** and then later **Julie Schwartz,** *all* of whom had fundamentally different approaches to the character and the concept and the type of stories they wanted. There was no one single Superman anymore, there were like fifteen, and so you didn't care. In the terms of the X-Men all of the books are edited, except for EXCALIBUR of course, by **Bob Harras,** and that gives the books a significant editorial cohesion because you're not fighting one department versus another. There is hopefully at the top a singular vision, but you never know.

PAT: *With EXCALIBUR off in the corner in a sense because it's being edited by Terry Cavanaugh, and also off in a corner in a sense because the characters are headquartered in Britain —*

CHRIS: As opposed to the X-Men who are headquartered in Australia.

PAT: *Granted.* (Laughter.) *Does that give you an opportunity to deal with EXCALIBUR less in terms of the grand scale Marvel and mutant continuity?*

CHRIS: Well, in a fundamental sense, as with all of the books, they will deal with continuity when it suits the story's purpose, and ignore it when it doesn't. As far as the book's *brief,* we call it the Cosmic Comedy Caper title for a very good reason. This is a book where, as I said earlier, anything can happen; they can end up anywhere, across the galaxy, in a different dimension — the more absurd the better!

The way I think of it and have been describing it is we're trying for a feel very much akin to the classic **Patrick MacNee/Diana Rigg** AVENGERS episodes where you had dastardly villains and nefarious schemes, but presented with more than a modicum of style and wit and panache. The idea is that we want to do the same thing. And being as Captain Britain is tied in with a cosmic person, Roma, and being as Phoenix herself is a fairly cosmic oriented entity, it seemed perfectly logical that the stories should occasionally have a cosmic sweep, as do the stories in THE X-MEN. And Alan is one of the few artists who is capable of doing not only very quiet, intimate, down to earth

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"I have absolutely no sense of humor whatsoever."

character scenes, but mind-boggling **Kirbyesque** universal panoramas, giant starships, obliterations of entire omniverses, you name it. He does great aliens.

PAT: *I've also heard you say that he does great women.*

CHRIS: Not too shabby. *(Laughter.)* He does great guys, he does great kids, he does great adults, he does a neat dragon. I have yet to see anything that he does *not* do great, but I'm going to keep pushing to try and find out. I figure my brief as writer is to come up with stories that excite him and interest him and make him want to draw his socks off, because then by the same token the story that has inspired him to do his best work as an artist will inspire me when I get the pages to do my best work as a writer, which is how it should be all of the time. And the ultimate beneficiary of all this incredible glad-handling is, of course, the reader.

PAT: *Speaking in terms of that kind of work, has working across that big puddle between the two of you created any specific problems, any changes in the way you would normally work with an artist?*

CHRIS: Not really, other than the humongous phone bill. *(Laughter.)* Not really. In certain respects the way an artist and a writer work together is defined more by the character of the people involved than by the actual physical situation. I think Alan and I would probably not work any differently together if we both lived in Manhattan than we do now with him living in England, simply because of the kind of person he is. On the other hand working with someone like **Walter Simonson**, when we were working on X-MEN/TEEN TITANS for example, part of the treat there was literally sitting down with him and spending ten or twelve *hours* going through the plot and just bouncing ideas off each other, and saying, "Wait a minute, this could do this, and this could do this!" — and coming up with this evolving organic holistic nightmare.

That obviously is a lot more difficult when the artist and writer are physically removed from each other and all you have to go on is this tinny voice on the telephone. You can't act out scenes, you can't throw in body language, you can't *see* how the other person is responding to what you are saying, and he can't see how you are responding to him. I could be describing what I think is the most wonderful scene in the story, and Alan or whomever may indeed think so, but if all they do is go "hm, mm, mmhm" then my reaction is "Ahh, my gosh, he doesn't like it!" or *(sweaty desperation)* "I'm not getting it across!" But I think, based on what we've been doing, Alan and I are cooking really strongly. I hope it gets better just because if it does get better *whooo!*

PAT: *How much contribution to plot and story do you feel that Alan makes?*

CHRIS: As much as he feels is necessary, as much as he wants. Case in point, again the third issue, the *structure* of the first half of the book is substantially different from what I had in mind. I wrote out what I thought would a be good opening, and Alan read it and had what he thought was a better idea, and he tried it out on me and I agreed, so we're going with it. Again, when comics are done right, when the ideal is also the reality, it's a collaboration in the truest sense of the word. The lines between the writer and the artist in terms of generating a plot, who generates the plot, tend to blur because each partner contributes that little something or that much something. One person might come up with the basic choreography, the other person with the rationale that makes it work, or the twist that makes it unique, or have a better idea as to how a scene should be played to make it more in line with something else, with the theme of the book or with the theme of the story.

And Alan is by nature one of the most considerate people I have ever worked with in that if he feels that a change is necessary then he wants to check it out with me or with Bob, generally with both of us, (A) to make sure that it doesn't violate the integrity of the story, but (B) just so it won't come as a great tearing surprise. And by the same token if there's a reason that I have for putting the scene in in a certain manner and that changing it would not work, I tell him and we come to a mutually acceptable resolution. But that's how it should be, two people working *together* creating a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.

PAT: *Have you ever wished that you were an artist yourself, that you were controlling the final look of the book from the word go?*

CHRIS: Oh, sure, all of the time, but fortunately it's a lot easier for a writer to know his limitations in that regard than it is for artists to realize their limitations as writers. I know the minute I try to draw a picture that I haven't got it. *(Laughter.)* It's a lot easier to fool yourself with words.

PAT: *Moving on to some other of your projects, I spoke with you a while ago about the Wolverine series for MARVEL COMICS, and now I've seen something about a separate WOLVERINE series. Has that been moved out of the biweekly?*

CHRIS: No. Actually the biweekly came about *after* the monthly. Basically it got to the point where Marvel got tired of listening to Ann's and my arguments or refusals to do a WOLVERINE series, they had been trying to get one on the boards ever since the first mini-series that Frank and I did. Basically my response had been, "No, no, no, no, no." And Weezie's response and Ann's response. And finally **Tom DeFalco** decided that he would not take no for an answer, and said either we would do it or someone else would do it but it would be done. So we decided it was time to get to work. *(Laughter.)*

So what we have in MARVEL COMICS is in a sense the kickoff, the introductory storyline, to Wolverine's own series, which gets into my fictional but very real sounding country in Southeast Asia, called Madjipor. *(Singsongy.)* The most loathsome hive of scum of the earth is Madjipor. *(Laughter.)* It gives him the secret identity that he will be using in the series, introduces him to *some* of the major characters from the series, and just has an adventure. It basically sets up the fundamental parameters of the series, and then with the first issue of the monthly title we just take off and go.

The easiest way to describe the series is a synthesis of CONAN THE BARBARIAN meets TERRY AND THE PIRATES — total high adventure; the exotic East, more in keeping with pulp

"It's a lot easier for a writer to know

sensibilities than with reality; dastardly, stylish villains; exotic beauties; lost civilizations. In essence Madjipoor bears as much relation to the real Southeast Asia as the Casablanca of the Warner Brothers film did to the real city. You know, it is more a state of mind, fantasy Southeast Asia than the reality. But what the hell, this is comics.

PAT: *Does all of this require writing Wolverine out of THE X-MEN?*

CHRIS: No more than Thor or Captain America or Iron Man having their own titles required that they be written out of THE AVENGERS back in the '60s. There are many hours in the day, many days in the year, he doesn't have to spend all of them in the X-Men, and fortunately there's lots of time for him to go off and play.

PAT: *Some times in the past there has been, particularly at Marvel . . . the time between issues seems to be nonexistent.*

CHRIS: Yeah, I've done strings of issues, most notably the entire Dark Phoenix storyline where from issue #134 to the end of #137 is something on the order of two days, and the last half of #134 to the beginning of #137 occurs over a space of something like four hours in one night — which was always the thing that I guess readers never *quite* caught onto. It took six months to tell a story of two days. More currently, #232, #233, and #234 all take place in one night, and again that's three months to tell about one night. So that leaves *lots* of time for Wolverine to go off and do what he wants anywhere else. And that gives the fans something to chew on, trying to fit it all into the continuity. *(Laughter.)*

PAT: *When you passed the writing reigns of NEW MUTANTS over to Weezie, was that to prepare yourself and give yourself the time for new projects like EXCALIBUR and WOLVERINE?*

CHRIS: Yeah, pretty much. It was originally only going to be for six months until we got EXCALIBUR out of the way, then once EXCALIBUR got out of the way suddenly we had like four or five more titles on the horizon, and Weezie was having so much fun with it and was doing such a good job that it seemed pointless to take it back; and indeed the book seems to be selling better than ever, which is fine with me.

PAT: *How would you characterize the difference between your and Weezie's attitude toward the New Mutants?*

CHRIS: Well, in one level I created the characters, so I have a basic *reluctance* to kill them. That never stopped Weezie. *(Laughter.)* I think she is a lot more in tune to the kid aspect of them than I was. I think my New Mutants were a lot more on the sober side, her New Mutants are a lot more teen oriented, a lot younger in spirit, and perhaps truer to what they are and what they should be than the way I was playing them. And she has a truly *wicked* imagination. In the current storyline this character Spider is a real gem, and things like the smile faces. In some ways I think she's doing the book far better than I could, or than I did.

But you know, to compare me and her really is to compare apples and oranges. It's not that her New Mutants are ipso facto better or worse than mine, it's substantially different and yet it is all growing out of the same genesis. They're still the same kids that I set up and such, but they're evolving in different direction. While as the person who used to write the title, as the creator of most of the characters, I might look at what she's doing and say, "Well, I wouldn't do that!" — but who cares? If I wanted to I would write the book. And more importantly, as a reader I *love* it! *(Laughter.)* "Ooo, vicious! Ooo ooo!" The same thing holds true for X-FACTOR. When that book first came out I couldn't read it, I couldn't stand it. It was like, "Ooo, who are these people masquerading as the original X-Men?" And of late it is a book that is brim full of passion and power and poignancy and adventure and humor. It's some of the best stuff Walter has done as a penciller in quite awhile. It's very relaxed, it's very stylish.

his limitations than it is for artists."

There are some absolutely *viciously* delightful characters and characterizations.

And I find when I read X-FACTOR and NEW MUTANTS and POWER PACK and on and on that when I finish an issue my first reaction is, "What happens next!?" As a writer and as a reader that is what I look for, in my own work and in someone else's — you get to the end and your first reaction should be, "Ah, the story's over! What happens next?" That is our function in many respects, as periodical writers, as storytellers, as entertainers — we want to keep the audience coming back for more, and we want to keep them coming back as *hungrily* and as *desperately* as possible. I *want* kids lined up outside of comic-book stores the third Thursday of every month, waiting for the next X-MEN, which is how it used to be back when John and I were doing it

PAT: *Doing your versions of Sheherazade.*

CHRIS: Yeah. That is perhaps my basic disagreement with the decision for the WOLVERINE series, my own instinct would be if they want to exploit the character to give the readers a really good mini-series every year, so that the readership is sitting out there with just enough WOLVERINE to whet their appetite, but *never* enough so that they feel sated, that they've had their fill of it. Because once you're satisfied, once you've got enough, "Oh, God, WOLVERINE, it's a good story but *fifteen* of them a year, who needs it. *Hey*, nice SUPERMAN!"

PAT: *I see what you mean.*

CHRIS: You don't want to leave the readership — crass, callous, manipulative as it sounds — you don't want to leave them the option of looking somewhere else. What you want to do is force their eyes, through sheer brilliance, through style, through dynamics, whatever, to what you have to offer. It's a crowded rack and you want your book to stand out more brightly, more powerfully, more demandingly, than the other 40 or 50 titles around it. You want the kid to go for you *first*. Let him go to the others, but he goes to you *first!*

And if everybody is following that attitude, again the person who benefits the most is the reader, because he or she has a tremendous variety of top-notch work to choose from. If everyone out there is just turning out the same old schlock month after month as though on a computer program or on an assembly line, if the creators are bored, then the reader is bored, and if the reader is bored then the reader will find some other way to spend the money. We don't want that.

PAT: *Do you ever wish that there were something else in the comics medium as popular or as likely to support your making a living as the superhero genre, something else you could sit down and write?*

CHRIS: What do you mean? Do you mean as opposed to historical fantasy, as opposed to sword and sorcery, as opposed to science fiction, as opposed to mysteries? I haven't done a Western in a long time.

PAT: *If you were writing Westerns today chances are that they would not be as popular as X-MEN and EXCALIBUR.*

CHRIS: Well, possibly not. On the other hand it may be because no one has found the right way to present a Western. I mean it's all very well to look at THE X-MEN and say, "Well, there is the behemoth standing bestride the world." On the other hand you're also looking at a book that spent fourteen years getting there. If THE X-MEN is preeminent it is obviously because the book is doing something right. They're doing things at DC, at Marvel, in the stuff the independents are doing, that attempt to broaden the market, and nothing at this point has caught on. Presumably everyone will keep trying until something does click, and the companies will all jump madly onto whatever the new trend is.

Yeah, I wish lots of things would be as popular as THE X-MEN, and unfortunately lots of things aren't, and there are lots of things that *are* popular that I feel shouldn't be. But I don't think *my* stuff is as popular as it should be. *(Laughter.)* I mean it's all very well, THE X-MEN sells between 400,000 and 500,000 copies a month, but big deal, that's a nation out there of a quarter of a billion people. That does leave, it seems to me, somewhere in the neighborhood of 249.5 million potential readers that we're not reaching. I think the same applies to the other companies as well. There's a big market out there that we aren't tapping for whatever reason, lack of ability, lack of whatever. So I don't know.

I think if someone comes up with a good idea nine times out of ten — depending on the someone, if it's someone like me or **Frank Miller** or **Alan Moore** or **John**

WHERE'D THIS CROWD COME FROM?
I-- smee-- brought them.
Teleporter, that's me!
HUSH, YOU BOASTFUL REPTILE.
THE TECHNET, BY NATURE, ABHORS VIOLENCE.
BUT, IF PROVOKED, WE'LL BE HAPPY TO INDULGE...
...IN WHATEVER LEVEL OF PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION YOU DESIRE.

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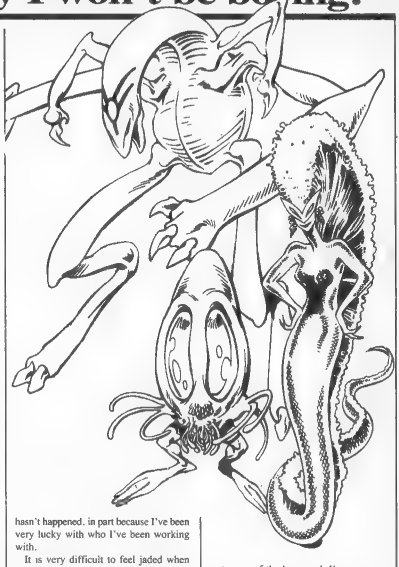
"Hopefully I won't be boring."



Byrne or Walter or Louise — *whatever* idea we presented to the various companies, if it was at bedrock a fundamentally good idea, or even a fundamentally great idea, I'm sure they'd go for it. Not because they have any faith in the idea per se, but because, you know, it's Walt and Weezie, they want to make nice with Walt this week, "Let's give it a shot and see what happens." Hopefully that is one of the briefs of the biweekly book. We are trying to sell 32 pages every other week, that's a phenomenal amount of material, but by the same token you can hang the book's sales on a Wolverine lead feature and sneak in something weird in the back. The first lineup on MARVEL COMICS has got **Wolverine**, Man-Thing by **Gerber** and **Sutton**, Shang-Chi by **Doug Moench** and **Tom Grindberg**, and I believe the Silver Surfer by **Al Milgrom.** Man-Thing and Shang-Chi are two genres that have not been done in awhile, and more importantly they are by two people that have not been seen at Marvel in awhile, and for all anybody knows they may catch fire really nicely. Let's hope that is indeed the case. If Man-Thing makes a resurgence with **Gerber** writing it, or if Shang-Chi comes back, then in a sense we have broadened the parameters a little.

PAT: *To close out this interview, you've probably been asked this before but I don't remember seeing an answer to it: Do you envision a time when you'll finally say, you know, umpty-ump years of writing this bunch of mutants is enough?*

CHRIS: Well, I suppose sooner or later everybody dies. *(Laughter.)* That's one way of looking at it. Realistically, yeah, nothing lasts forever. Marvel could be sold tomorrow, I could be fired tomorrow, I could quit tomorrow, I could be run over by a bus tomorrow, who the hell knows. The lump answer I've always given to questions like that is that I will hopefully have the strength of character to quit when it stops being fun, when I stop enjoying the characters and the books and the work and it starts being a job. At this point it hasn't happened, in part because I've been very lucky with who I've been working with.

It is very difficult to feel jaded when you're working with people the likes of **Marc Silvestri** and **Rick Leonardi** and **Alan Davis** and **John Buscema** — who I might add on WOLVERINE is turning out some of the best work I've seen out of him in years, it is so lively and so much fun. He seems to really enjoy it. He likes the character, he seems to like the setting. It's a **Buscema** I haven't seen in quite awhile, and it's a lot of fun.

And, you know, when you work with people like Frank and **Barry Windsor-Smith** and **John Romita, Jr.** and **Byrne**, it's very difficult to then sit back and think, "Ngh, comics, what a pain." So as long as I can still get that *rush* out of the books, out of the concepts, out of the characters, as long as I can pick up a set of pages that have come in from a penciller and go, *"Wow!* Neat stuff!! Whoopie, I can't wait to write this shit!" — then I'll stick around. Hopefully I won't be boring. Hopefully if I start to get boring then I'll know it and have the gumption to call it quits. Hopefully that hasn't happened yet. Hopefully that won't happen for a while.

"I told him I would like to do a super-

JOE ORSAK & TOM PEYER

Unless you live in central New York state, you've probably never heard of Joe Orsak and Tom Peyer. Joe and Tom have been newspaper comics writer/artists for the better part of a decade — filling the pages of the SYRACUSE NEW TIMES and the SYRACUSE HERALD-AMERICAN with the exploits of such incredible beings as Captain 'Cuse, the Dome, Lake Effect, and Ronald Reagan. Carmela Merlo, a college Chemistry tutor and former President of the Comic Book Club of Ithaca — and her husband Roger Stern, who's written a comic-book story or two himself — coaxed Joe and Tom out of their studios to talk about their work...

CARMELA MERLO: *Tell us about the origins of the CAPTAIN 'CUSE strip. How did it get started and why?*

JOE ORSAK: I've always been interested in comics since childhood. When I was in high school I began to attempt to draw comic books. All through the '70s, I would periodically make presentatatons to Marvel. In '81, I went down to New York and made a presentation to **Archie Goodwin** and **Mary Jo Duffy** at Epic. Again I was unsuccessful... and I came back to Syracuse and I realized that I needed a lot more work, but I needed something to work on...something to put me into really tight training...something with a deadline, something that I could work on every week, that would sharpen up the skills I needed to work on. At that time, Tom was the cartoon editor at the SYRACUSE NEW TIMES, and he'd sent out an open call to local artists to submit ideas for comic strips. Initially, I came up with an idea for a humorous strip called SIRACUSA...it took place in an ancient Roman city in Sicily, but it had people and buildings and incidents that were parallel to the present-day

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Joe Orsak
Occupation: Advertising and Comic Illustrator
Born: 11 March 1952
Residence: Fayetteville, NY
Credits: Creator/artist of CAPTAIN 'CUSE, owner of Mastergraphics Studio, art director/partner of Silver Moon Advertising, winner of Celebrity Croquet Tourney
Pet Peeves: Smoking, "healthy" people who park in handicapped spaces, colds, CHEEVERWOOD

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Tom Peyer
Occupation: Cartoonist
Born: 23 February 1954
Residence: Syracuse, NY
Credits: Writer and artist of SIDESHOW, writer of CAPTAIN 'CUSE

Fave Raves: Good comic books, Elvis Costello, POLICE SQUAD, Tom Carvel

Pet Peeve: Constructive engagement, supply-side economics, imperialism, bad comic books

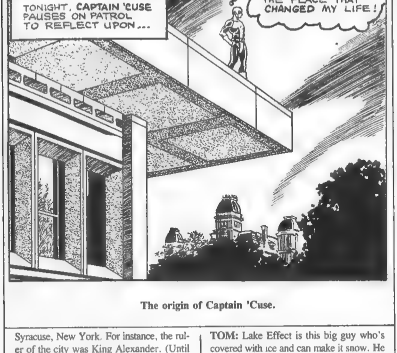
All art accompanying this interview © 1986 Mastergraphics Studio, unless otherwise noted.

hero based on the city of Syracuse."

Photo: Tim Gray

Joe Orsak, (left) with Tom Peyer.

"We wanted to make the segment of our



The origin of Captain 'Cuse.

Syracuse, New York. For instance, the ruler of the city was King Alexander. (Until recently, **Lee Alexander** was mayor of Syracuse, New York.)

TOM PEYER: That was a funny strip... well drawn, too. Joe has a really nice gag-cartoon style that you've never seen.

JOE: So I did four installments of that. And when I presented them to Tom, I told him I would like to do a super-hero based in the city of Syracuse. I wanted to call him Captain Syracuse, and all the action would take place in the city or in the suburbs and it would have real buildings and real people tied in with real events. And... how did you react to that?

TOM: I said good. I knew he could draw, and we were looking for local content. If you pick up the SYRACUSE NEW TIMES, which is the paper I do SIDESHOW for, you'll see that everything in it is of local origin. We've run syndicated stuff in the past, but it hasn't worked out. There's a very strong identification throughout the paper with Syracuse and Central New York. CAPTAIN 'CUSE seemed like a good idea, too, because everything else was a funny strip... and if it worked out, it wouldn't be that funny.

JOE: The first episode ran February 3, 1982, and that introduced the villain Lake Effect... actually, before Captain 'Cuse himself was introduced. That happened the following week.

TOM: Lake Effect is this big guy who's covered with ice and can make it snow. He likes snow and he doesn't like anything else. If he could get his way, it would always be winter.

CARMELA: *A perfectly appropriate villain for Syracuse.*

ROGER STERN: *So, CAPTAIN 'CUSE began appearing in the NEW TIMES and became a big success, right?*

JOE: It sort of grew in popularity. I started getting fan mail from interesting people. When I had Captain 'Cuse fall off the State Tower Building and injure his head, he was taken to Upstate Medical Center for brain surgery. And during his stay in the hospital, I received a menu from Upstate's dietary department, signed by everyone in the department! The message on it was, "Whatever you do, don't let Captain 'Cuse eat the food!" *(Laughter.)* I also received a letter from the manager of the State Tower Building, thanking me for putting her building in the strip.

So the strip kept on appearing every week, and eventually I approached the SYRACUSE HERALD-AMERICAN about carrying CAPTAIN 'CUSE. The HERALD-AMERICAN is the major newspaper for the centeral NY region... its circulation is much larger than that of the NEW TIMES. Luckily, I presented the idea to the editor right at a time when he was looking for something to fill up the HERALD's Sunday STARS magazine. STARS initially contained the TV listings for the Syracuse area, but they had just begun a TV cable magazine for the TV listings. That left something missing from STARS, and they were afraid that people would stop reading STARS because the TV listings weren't there. The editor felt that having CAPTAIN 'CUSE on page two of STARS would be an added plus to get people to read it. He was very open to the idea and has had very few complaints about the strip. Very few editorial changes have been made so far. I have pretty much free run of what I want to do, within reason, keeping decency in mind. You don't want to show nudity or too much violence, although I'm surprised at what I do get away with sometimes. You know, like having the Thing from Onondaga Lake being reduced to a skeleton.

TOM: *(Laughter.)* We just had a guy get his head crushed by a cinderblock.

CARMELA: *On camera or off camera?*

JOE: The head's off camera!

TOM: It's tasteful.

ROGER: *Something that interests me about CAPTAIN 'CUSE, is its local and regional color. You really go all-out to put in a lot of real buildings. Almost every building I've seen in that strip is real. You see the Carrier Dome and the State Tower Building and Upstate Medical Center and the Niagara Mohawk building — all these real buildings — and real people, too. The weathermen and the news teams from the three TV stations in Syracuse, and public figures like the mayor. In that respect, the only similar strip that comes to mind is Don Rosa's CAPTAIN KENTUCKY, which was set in Louisville, Kentucky, and featured local figures and such. Of course, you play a little less fast and loose with your mayor than Don did with the mayor of Louisville.*

TOM: What did he do?

ROGER: *Well, the mayor of Louisville travels — or traveled, I guess there's a new mayor there now — so much that he made Lee Alexander look like a shut-in.* (Laughter.) *I believe Johnny Carson made jokes about the guy.*

TOM: So the mayor in CAPTAIN KENTUCKY was played as a total fool?

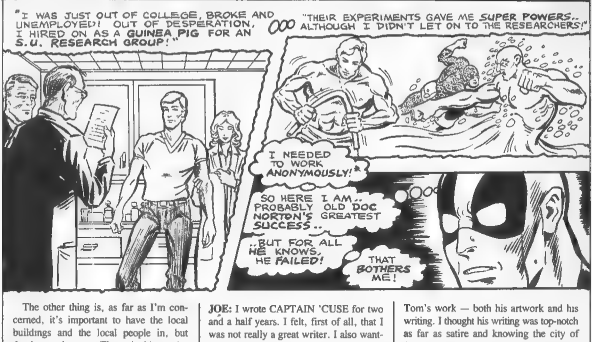
JOE: There's a couple reasons we don't do that in CAPTAIN 'CUSE...

TOM: ...too much.

ROGER: *Mainly because Tom does it in SIDESHOW!*

TOM: Right, I do it in SIDESHOW! *(Laughter.)* I'm writing and drawing SIDESHOW for the NEW TIMES, and writing CAPTAIN 'CUSE now for the HERALD. If I put too much satire in CAPTAIN 'CUSE, the NEW TIMES would be — I think — rightfully annoyed, because they are my home base.

audience that reads comic books angry."


"I WAS JUST OUT OF COLLEGE, BROKE AND UNEMPLOYED! OUT OF DESPERATION, I HIRED ON AS A GUINEA PIG FOR AN S.U. RESEARCH GROUP!"
"THEIR EXPERIMENTS GAVE ME SUPER POWERS.. ALTHOUGH I DIDN'T LET ON TO THE RESEARCHERS!"
I NEEDED TO WORK ANONYMOUSLY!
SO HERE I AM.. PROBABLY OLD DOC NORTON'S GREATEST SUCCESS..
BUT FOR ALL HE KNOWS, HE FAILED!
THAT BOTHERS ME!

The other thing is, as far as I'm concerned, it's important to have the local buildings and the local people in, but they're not the story. The main thing we're trying to do is to make a good story, a good comic-book story you might find in a good comic book. And these other things are just background the way New York is background in SPIDER-MAN. You don't pick up a SPIDER-MAN for jokes about New York, although you might find them there.

ROGER: *Tom, how did you come to write CAPTAIN 'CUSE?*

TOM: Joe asked me to.

JOE: I wrote CAPTAIN 'CUSE for two and a half years. I felt, first of all, that I was not really a great writer. I also wanted to spend more time doing the artwork, rather than just looking at a blank sheet of paper without having any idea what I was doing.

TOM: Now he has me not having any idea what *I'm* doing! *(Laughter.)*

JOE: I began to discover that I didn't plan ahead enough. I was just writing as I was going along, and that was getting me into trouble. And I felt that I was running out of really creative ideas. I've always liked Tom's work — both his artwork and his writing. I thought his writing was top-notch as far as satire and knowing the city of Syracuse and what's funny about Syracuse. Even the introduction Tom wrote to my book was funny, and good writing. So, I approached my editor with the idea. I said, "Look, I'm having trouble writing the strip myself. I'm getting into dry spots and I can't keep up the creativity on the writing end of it as much as I'd like. I need someone to come in and give me a hand with this. I'd like to use **Tom Peyer**, even though he's with a different newspaper. Would it be okay with you guys if I hired him on as the writer?" The reaction was favorable. All my editor, **Tim Bunn**, was interested in was buying the package of CAPTAIN 'CUSE art. How I produced that art was my business. He didn't mind at all that someone else would be writing it; he didn't care where else Tom worked; it wasn't a problem.

TOM: What if you had to commit a crime to produce the CAPTAIN 'CUSE strip? He still wouldn't care? *(Laughter.)*

JOE: That I don't know!

TOM: I think we won't tell him. Not that we've ever *yet* had to commit a crime... *(Laughter.)*

JOE: Right. So Tom and I talked about it, and we agreed. Now Tom and I co-plot the strip and he writes it. One of the first things Tom and I did together was to create Salty.

ROGER: *Yes, Captain 'Cuse's kid sidekick. I was revolted by the whole idea of Salty, until I found out what he really was!*

TOM: We did that for people who hate kid sidekicks. We just wanted to make the whole segment of our audience that reads comic books angry. *(Laughter.)* Comic-

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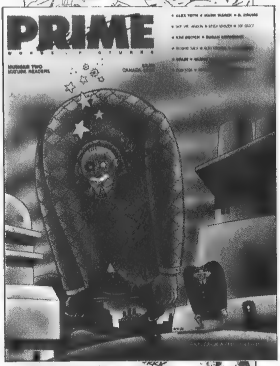

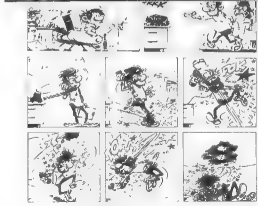

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"...some of them hated the idea..."

book readers don't like kid sidekicks anymore. I think it goes back to the BATMAN TV show. I don't know. I like kid sidekicks, 'cause I'm older than that. I didn't like 'em when I was a kid... I think they're something you like more when you're an adult. Anyway, we created Salty and...how long did we have him in the strip?

JOE: We started in October of 1984...

TOM: It seemed like forever!

JOE: ...and we finally finished the entire story right in time for Ithacon 10 in April of 1985. So it was a good half-a-year.

TOM: He turned out to be a monster from outer space.

ROGER: *"Meshugeneh," or however it's pronounced.* (Laughter.)

JOE: Meg-sag-at-sui.

ROGER: *Right. What you said.*

TOM: The whole deal was, he pretended to be a helpful kid sidekick in order to kill Captain 'Cuse. And it was really a lot more entertaining than it sounds.

CARMELA: *It was!*

JOE: The whole thing with Salty was leading to the payoff that he was this alien creature. We built up to that panel for six months...

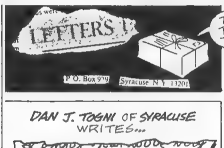
TOM: Just for that moment!

JOE: In that time, we had to not only make Captain 'Cuse believe that Salty was a good kid, but we wanted to make the readers feel the same way. When we were at a comics convention at the Syracuse Landmark Theater in November of '84, we tried to get feedback from the fans there, to learn how they felt about Salty. Did it bother them that 'Cuse had acquired a kid sidekick? And from the response we got, people seemed divided about half-and-half...some of them hated the idea and some of them liked it.

TOM: It *is* true that a lot more people liked him than I thought would have liked him. There may be a new crop of kids who don't remember kid sidekicks, and haven't really learned to hate them yet.

JOE: Salty was brought along to the point where Captain 'Cuse saw him as a good kid worth risking his life to save. And he also won over the sympathy of the readers. Then we really threw them all for a loop when it was revealed that Salty wasn't a good kid at all.

TOM: Of course, that's going to make it tougher to get them to trust us the next time!


LETTERS !
TIK TIK TIK
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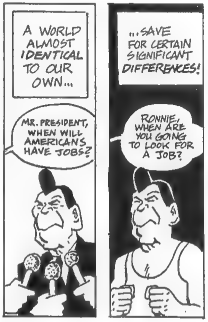
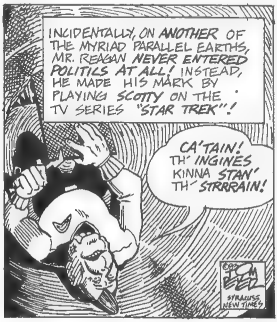
Syracuse N.Y. 13201
...I JUST NEGLECTED TO MEANTION THAT THE PRESIDENT'S LAYOFF OCCURRED ON A PARALLEL EARTH IN ANOTHER DIMENSION...
DAN J. TOSNI OF SYRACUSE WRITES...
In recent episodes you established that Pres. Reagan was laid off, yet in last week's Sideshow he was back to being president. What gives?
WELL, DAN, THE EXPLANATION IS PRETTY SIMPLE..
EARTH-1
EARTH-2
DIMENSIONAL BARRIER


A WORLD ALMOST IDENTICAL TO OUR OWN...
MR. PRESIDENT, WHEN WILL AMERICA'S HAVE JOBS?
...SAVE FOR CERTAIN SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES!
RONNIE, WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO LOOK FOR A JOB?

LAST WEEK'S SIDESHOW TOOK PLACE ON OUR EARTH, WHERE MR. REAGAN IS STILL PRESIDENT! CLEAR ENOUGH?


INCIDENTALLY, ON ANOTHER OF THE MYRIAD PARALLEL EARTHS, MR. REAGAN NEVER ENTERED POLITICS AT ALL! INSTEAD, HE MADE HIS MARK BY PLAYING SCOTTY ON THE TV SERIES "STAR TREK"!
CA'TAIN! TH' INGINES KINNA STAN' TH' STRRRAIN!
SYRACUSE NEW TIMES

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"We're not going to have any mutants."

(Laughter.) But we'll worry about that when we think up our next scam.

CARMELA: *Apparently, very young children like kid sidekicks. Our friends, Bill and Lisa Turner, have a six-year-old and a four-year-old, and the younger boy especially likes Robin. Their older boy likes Nightwing, but the little one likes the new Robin.*

TOM: Little kids and people like me. I buy BATMAN now because they have a new Robin who's a kid again. But most comic-book fans just detest kid sidekicks, so that's why we put him in. We haven't had any mutants yet, I don't think. Have we had any mutants?

JOE: No. We're not going to have any.

ROGER: *Tom, you were already working at the NEW TIMES and doing SIDESHOW when CAPTAIN 'CUSE got off the ground. How did you get started at the NEW TIMES?*

TOM: Well, I've never really been on staff there. I've had a deal with them for the last eight years that I give them a funny cartoon every week and help them pick comics by other people. The way I got started was, well, I'm not entirely proud of this fact, but I happened to know somebody on the staff *(Laughter.)* who wrote for the paper, who just would not leave me alone until I submitted some samples. So I submitted some samples and they were rejected. Somebody else got the space to do a comic strip. But that didn't work out, so the space was open again — and again, my friend simply wouldn't leave me alone, calling me up late at night, every day, saying, "Did you get the samples in yet?" I really didn't think I'd get the spot, but just to shut him up I did it. His name is **Frank Malfitano**. He made me do it. The samples were accepted, and SIDESHOW started in late '78.

ROGER: *Since then, the strip has had a semi-regular cast...*

TOM: Headed by **Ronald Reagan**.

ROGER: *...Headed by Ronald Reagan, but Mayor Lee Alexander's cat was a major character for a while. How did that start?*

TOM: Well, that was inspired by CICERO'S CAT and, of course, by FAT FREDDY'S CAT. CICERO'S CAT was a little comic strip that used to run underneath the Sunday MUTT AND JEFF strip. I remember seeing those when I was little, reprinted in MUTT AND JEFF comic books. I guess that's where **Gilbert Shelton** got the idea for running FAT FREDDY'S CAT.

ROGER: *But why Lee Alexander?*

TOM: I was doing all local political gags at the time, and I was reading THE SMITHSONIAN COLLECTION OF NEWSPAPER COMICS. I was really impressed by all of the work that went into

those old Sunday comics pages. Those artists would put so much drawing into them! They'd have a full Sunday page, with a little strip up top and around the bottom. They just gave you everything all the time. I was inspired. So, I decided to put a little extra strip on the bottom of SIDESHOW. As the mayor of Syracuse, **Lee Alexander** was one of my characters, so I decided to do his cat.

ROGER: *Does he really have a cat?*

TOM: He's allergic to cats.

ROGER: *He's allergic to cats?!* (Laughter.)

TOM: It got a fair amount of attention for the amount of work I did with it, because I didn't do it that many times. But it was a recurring character and a lot of people liked it. The reason I didn't use it too many times was I had to use each episode not only to make a funny joke and a point about cat

behavior, but also a point about the mayor's behavior. Having all those things converge is a mess of work. Also, when you've made five or six jokes about different aspects of the personality of a mayor of a mid-sized city, you've just about run out of aspects of his personality, and it's time to move on to something else.

ROGER: *Not everyone is Ed Koch, after all.*

TOM: No, not everyone is **Ed Koch**. Thank God. *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *Another semi-regular SIDESHOW feature was the designer Pez dispenser...*

TOM: Yeah. I like Pez!

ROGER: *...all sorts of strange things, like the rabid dog Pez dispenser.*

TOM: One week I was really stuck for an idea, so I just put Pez in there! *(Laughter.)* I had just seen Pez dispensers around again; they weren't around for years. So I started getting them. I always hated the candy. Kids, don't eat Pez candy! It tastes bad! But the dispensers are fun because they're like toys, they have candy in them; it's bad candy, but it's in them. They're like art, you can stand them up, they're different, so I liked having them around. I got about a dozen of them in a month. So I decided, well, gee, what kind of Pez dispensers would I really like to have? And of course it was **Mao Tse-Tung** Pez, **Ronald Reagan** Pez... *(Laughter.)*

JOE: **Stephen Rogers** Pez...

TOM: Right, **Stephen Rogers** Pez. **Stephen Rogers** is Joe's boss at the HEARLD...Joe's boss of all bosses.

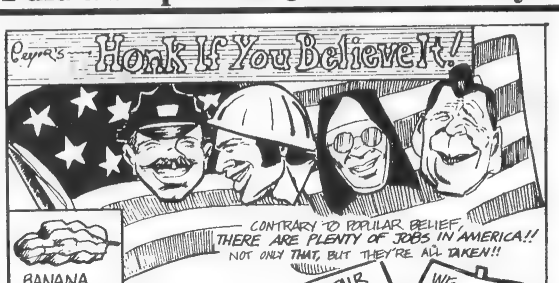
ROGER: *Of course, Ronald Reagan is a prominent character in SIDESHOW. For a while during his first term in office, there was a running "America Held Hostage" gag.*

TOM: Yes, when the paper came out each Wednesday, under an "America Held Hostage" logo, I'd give a running count of how many days he'd been president. I got up to 400 and something...maybe more that that, I don't remember. But I stopped counting because other papers were starting to run the strip on a delayed basis, and I didn't want them to run with a phony number on them.

ROGER: *Oh, is SIDESHOW syndicated now?*

TOM: It is and it isn't. At the NEW TIMES, we trade issues with a lot of other papers, and sometimes one of those papers will just rip SIDESHOW out and run it. Sometimes they'll pay me, and sometimes they won't. I'm always glad when they do. There's a paper up in British Columbia — MONDAY MAGAZINE...good paper — that was running it for a while. They still

"I did a strip about Jesus's birthday."


Geyer's Honk If You Believe It!
CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, THERE ARE PLENTY OF JOBS IN AMERICA!! NOT ONLY THAT, BUT THEY'RE ALL TAKEN!!
BANANA IN THE SHAPE OF A NATURAL ROCK FORMATION! Cochestershire-withenhampwicktonon, England
UNFAIR TO DELAWARE!
WE WANT THAT STUFF!
THERE ARE NO PYRAMIDS, ACTIVE VOLCANOES, OR LUNAR CRATERS IN THE ENTIRE STATE OF DELAWARE!!

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run it occasionally. And right now, I'm working on syndicating it myself. I hope to be in as many papers as I can by the time this sees print.

ROGER: *You're talking about . . . what, alternative newspapers? I guess that's what they're called today. They're hardly underground papers anymore. Certainly, they're published with the idea of making a profit.*

TOM: Yeah. To me, an alternative paper is a paper with a big audience in a conventional market . . . that is run by people who are too open-minded to censor your work. I've done cartoons for alternative papers that I don't think could ever appear in an ordinary daily newspaper. And that's the way I want to keep it. I did a SIDESHOW strip about Jesus's birthday, and I can't think of a daily paper that it would've gotten into.

ROGER: *Certainly not the CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR!*

TOM: No.

CARMELA: *That's strange when you think about it. I remember that as a rather charming little strip.*

TOM: Well, thanks. I didn't do it to hurt anybody. It was just this strip where Christ comes into his apartment and people are standing around, ready to give him a surprise party. And he gets all mad and says, "You know I hate it when people make a fuss about my birthday!" And there was a caption at the end that said, "Uh-oh!" We ran that one Christmas week. Most dailies wouldn't run that, but alternatives would because . . . well, who knows why? I think that smaller businesses don't get as worried about some things as big businesses do, they're not as hide-bound. It's a nice outlet . . . you've got an audience and the "liberality," I'd call it. The alternatives are not *all* liberal papers.

MAUREEN MIDLAND OF SYRACUSE, N.Y. WATCHED AN ENTIRE COMMON COUNCIL MEETING ON CABLE TV!!
SHE THOUGHT SHE WAS WATCHING A 'LOVE BOAT' EPISODE GUEST-STARRING RUTH BUZZI AND JERRY VAN DYKE!
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Clorets
ROLL-ON BREATH DEODORANT Troy, N.Y.
A SLINKY THAT WALKS UPSTAIRS Submitted by Henry Jankiewicz

"I was a little embarrassed by that."

CARMELA: *Obviously, the overall tone of SIDESHOW is satirical, and you've already mentioned how some of the inspiration for the form of it came from THE SMITHSONIAN COLLECTION. But are there any particular cartoonists who've been an influence to you?*

TOM: When I was getting the strip together, I was very much paying attention to the underground cartoonists. They'll always be my favorites . . . people like **Bill Griffith**, **R. Grumb**, and **Justin Green** who did BINKY BROWN MEETS THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY . . . funniest comic book I ever read. The influences haven't really changed over the years . . . my work's changed. I've tried to simplify it a lot. But there are no established editorial cartoonists, say, that I've tried to emulate. That's death. The last thing in the world I'd want to do is imitate DOONESBURY, for instance! I think DOONESBURY is brilliant, but as a fan of DOONESBURY, when I see another strip that is an imitation of it, I refuse to read that strip on principle. I know it'll never be as funny, and I know that whoever is doing that strip is trying to profit off **Trudeau**'s work.

JOE: There's a strip now . . . CHEEVERWOOD . . . which is an imitation of BLOOM COUNTY . . . which is an imitation of DOONSBURY.

TOM: Yeah. So, I'm going to be working on an imitation of CHEEVERWOOD. *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *You're both working on weekly strips. What do you find are the constraints and advantages of working that way, as opposed to a day-to-day continuity?*

TOM: I've never tried to work on a daily strip, so I really can't make a comparison. But, when I write a CAPTAIN 'CUSE . . . people have to wait a whole week from one episode to the next to find out what's going to happen. So, when they come back, we'd better give them something. Something has to happen every week. If there's a cliffhanger, along with whatever suspense they feel, they should also feel that something did happen this week . . . something momentous or something big, something entertaining. I think you can lose an audience really easily with a weekly strip. A weekly habit is not the same as a daily habit . . . it takes a lot longer to establish that weekly habit. I don't think it's ever going to be as automatic, so you really can't take it for granted that people are going to pick it up.

CARMELA: *And at the same time, you don't have that much space to work with.*

TOM: Yes, but we still have more space than we would in a daily strip.

JOE: It's like trying to get a story into one page of a comic book.

TOM: Yeah, it might read a little stiff sometimes. I'll look at some of the comic books and I'll see someone like Roger or **Steve Englehart** turning out a scene that I really like and it goes on for a couple of pages, and I wish I had that room. I'd love to write something like that. But when you only have one page, it can help the writing . . . I'm sure you've found that a lack of space helps you trim out the stuff that really isn't necessary.

ROGER: *Oh, yeah! You take your copy and go through it with an ax!*

TOM: That's the hard work!

ROGER: *I think one of the best CAPTAIN 'CUSE stories I've read was just a single strip. It was a story about a girl running a Mom & Pop store.*

TOM: Oh, you liked that? Thank you. That was our "After School Special." I was a little embarrassed by that one . . . I'm glad you liked it! We're going to be doing some more one-page stories, mixing them in with the longer serials.

JOE: Our editor had requested that we cut down on the length of some of our stories. When we did the last Salty story, where Salty was kidnapped to an island in the Atlantic, we had some negative feedback . . . mainly because the story was too long and it got away from Syracuse. Unfortunately, we've just finished a storyline in which Captain 'Cuse visits New York City on vacation, and I had a comment from the editor that this is going to be coming out during State Fair week, which is a big deal in Syracuse. He asked me to make some sort of reference to it being State Fair week in that particular strip. So, I changed one of the Captain's thought balloons. Where he had been worrying about

"You can't say anything against Dr. Doom."

PROBLEM: AN IRATE SUBSCRIBER APPROACHES THE OBIT DESK. NEWS OF HIS DEATH HAD BEEN RUN IN THE PREVIOUS EDITION, YET THIS STORY IS OBVIOUSLY IN ERROR. DO YOU...

Lake Effect being on the loose while he goes off to New York, now it's going to read: "...but what will happen in Syracuse with Lake Effect on the loose during State Fair week, while I'm running around in New York City?"

TOM: Editors get picky sometimes, but it's easy to please them.

CARMELA: *Why is Captain 'Cuse in New York City, while Lake Effect is on the loose?*

TOM: Well, Lake Effect is hiding somewhere. And 'Cuse — in his secret identity — gets offered a free trip to New York City. He can't find Lake Effect anyway, so he takes it. And when he gets to New York City, he runs into this guy who puts on a George Jetson mask and drops cinder blocks on people from a tall building because they changed the formula for Coke. *(Hysterical laughter.)* I wanted to do something that you wouldn't believe could happen in Syracuse. But you can believe it would happen in New York.

ROGER: *You've done some revamping of Captain 'Cuse's old villain, The Dome. How did that come about?*

TOM: Yeah, he's a real dome now. The Dome was originally just a bald mobster, and we've changed him into one of those big-headed smart people, like Hector Hammond or the Leader. We wanted to get back to the old "brains versus brawn" conflict — where the villain has brains, the hero has brawn, but the hero still wins because he has heart. I think that conflict's been violated in a lot of comic books, because they make the brainy villain too physically strong.

JOE: Lex Luthor is an example.

TOM: Sure. Doctor Doom really is another example, but you can't say anything against Doctor Doom, he's such a great character. So, I didn't say that. *(Laughter.)*

ROGER: *You fellows are both still fairly active comics fans... as far as keeping up with the new books...*

TOM: More or less, yeah. You wanna make something of it? *(Laughter.)*

JOE: I read comics... I want to keep up with what's going on in the business. I still hope to get into a large market someday, and how am I going to do that if I don't know what the market is like?

TOM: I read comics to watch characters smash things. *(Laughter.)*

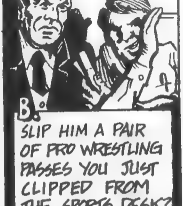
CARMELA: *A very primal reason!*

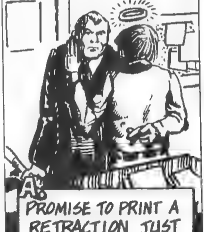
ROGER: *Joe, as you've expressed an interest in working in the mainstream comics, what would you like to be doing five or ten years from now?*

JOE: Well, I'd like to be penciling a book like CAPTAIN AMERICA or IRON MAN, perhaps ..or SPIDER-MAN!

ROGER: *What about you, Tom? What do you want to do five years from now?*

TOM: I dunno, what's on TV then? *(Laughter.)* If there's nothing on TV, I guess I'll go out. *(Laughter.)* I like comics. I want to work with comics. As far as I'm concerned, I like superhero comics, but they're a very small part of it. They're a very large part of the business in terms of volume, but in terms of what's possible and what's been done in the overall history of comics, they're a small but significant part.

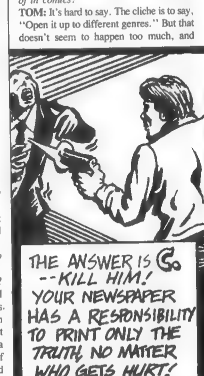




As long as I'm working on some sort of comic or cartoon or story or drawing or whatever, I'm happy. I don't know what the next few years will bring, because it just seems so wide open to me.

CARMELA: *Jumping off from what you said about superheroes being small-but-significant, what would you like to see more of in comics?*

TOM: It's hard to say. The cliche is to say, "Open it up to different genres." But that doesn't seem to happen too much, and



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"I want to see pigs sprout wings and fly."

when it does happen, people don't seem to buy it. So, I'm certainly not going to wish anyone to go out and lose their shirt over a Western. And there's a lot of stuff that doesn't belong to a genre . . . genre in this case meaning adventure fiction, something that's not a Western or a Detective story or what have you. I read this really nice Japanese strip in RAW Magazine about a girl going through puberty. That's all it was, just this quiet little story. I'm glad someone is doing stuff like that, it's great to read. I don't expect Marvel or DC to run out and do it, but as long as someone's doing it, I'm glad.

CARMELA: *For what kinds of comic-book stories do you find it easiest to suspend your disbelief . . . and on the flip side, what elements stop you dead in your tracks?*

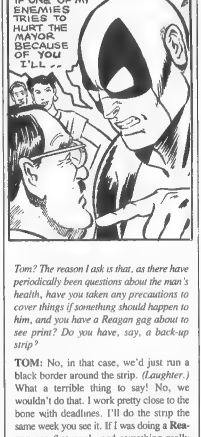
JOE: For me, a lot depends on how well the art comes off. If the art is convincing, it's a lot easier for me to get into the story. **John Byrne**'s work is a good example. In his SHE-HULK graphic novel, there's an awful lot of big machinery being moved around, and the She-Hulk picking things up, and it's drawn in such a way that you believe it. If artwork isn't convincing, if it's drawn in too cartoony a style, or something looks wrong, I sit and wonder, "How could that work?" Also, there are certain characters that I can readily believe — Captain America, for example, because he doesn't have any real superpowers. You'll see him exercising to keep in fighting trim. A book that was hard for me to believe was the old TEAM-UP where Hercules supposedly towed Manhattan Island back into place. *(Laughter.)* That was a little too much for me.

TOM: Belief's not a problem for me anymore. I look for the opposite. If I'm reading a comic or watching a fantasy movie, I'm not going there to see how much like the real world it is. I'm going there to see pigs sprout wings and fly. I loved the TIME BANDITS movie. The moment in the beginning of the movie, when the kid's closet opens, and the knight on horseback bounds out and jumps over the bed in slow motion . . . well, at that moment, I knew I had to come back the next night and see the movie again. Which I did.

JOE: I think that in growing up with comics and fantasy, and being in that environment where you're suspending your disbelief all the time, it just becomes easy to do so.

TOM: What I have trouble with is . . . when I open the newspaper, and I read that **Reagan**'s concerned about the Blacks in South Africa . . . I just can't suspend my disbelief!

ROGER: *Speaking of Reagan, how much lead time do you have with SIDESHOW,*



Tom? The reason I ask is that, as there have periodically been questions about the man's health, have you taken any precautions to cover things if something should happen to him, and you have a Reagan gag about to see print? Do you have, say, a back-up strip?

TOM: No, in that case, we'd just run a black border around the strip. *(Laughter.)* What a terrible thing to say! No, we wouldn't do that. I work pretty close to the bone with deadlines. I'll do the strip the same week you see it. If I was doing a **Reagan** gag that week, and something really horrible did happen to him — and there was no time to come up with something new — we'd probably run an oldie. But, . . well, the NEW TIMES comes out Wednesday at lunchtime, and I've handed SIDESHOW in as late as Tuesday afternoon at five.

ROGER: *That's close!*

TOM: That *is* close. With syndication, I'm going to be working a month in advance, so that's going to be different. Of course, one good thing about working so close, is that I can always do a strip that jumps off a current event. When the Philadelphia police bombed the MOVE headquarters, even though I draw for a weekly paper, I was one of the first cartoonists to have a cartoon out about it. I did the strip on Monday, and it was out two days later. When I get a month ahead, I'll have to change my outlook a bit. SIDESHOW won't be as event-oriented. It'll be more like **Jules Feiffer**'s strip, focusing more on the sort of greed and corruption that's always there. Of course, if something big happens — like the MOVE bombing — I can always do a strip at the last minute for the NEW TIMES, if not for the other papers.

CARMELA: *Do you ever have any disagreements over the script itself?*

JOE: Just minor ones. I have the final say on what gets put down on paper, since I'm the one who puts it down. There've been a few occasions where I've changed something in the dialogue For example, in a recent strip, I added a word or two to make things a little clearer to the reader.

TOM: And it worked. It was the right decision. It's always been the right decision . . . so far. If he ever makes the wrong decision, I'll just quit. *(Laughter.)*

"At the very beginning, I inked back-

JERRY

The name Jerry Robinson may be unfamiliar to most younger fans, but it's one that anybody with a serious interest in comics should know — because Jerry Robinson is one of the giants of the comics industry. A prolific comics artist, writer, political cartoonist, and comics historian, Robinson has created countless pages of comic art and has made significant contributions both to comics history and the scholarship of comics history. A former president of both the National Cartoonists Society and the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (the only artist ever to be so honored by his peers), Robinson is also a three-time winner of the NCS Reuben Award as Best Artist in his category (Syndicated Panel, Comic Books, Special Features). Currently a lecturer on Comic Art at the New School for Social Research, Robinson is also on the board of directors of the Cartoon Museum in Portchester, New York; the Museum Cartoon, in Basel, Switzerland; and the Truro Center for the Arts, Truro, Massachusetts.

Jerry began his career in comics while attending the Columbia School of Journalism in 1939. He started assisting Bob Kane at the age of seventeen and, in a very short time, graduated to penciling and inking BATMAN, as well as drawing most of the classic BATMAN covers from the period 1941-46. While Bob Kane indisputably originated the artistic vocabulary of BATMAN — the heavy shadows, moody lighting and weird camera angles that were intrinsic to the style — it was Jerry who perfected that style and took it even further when he assumed the art chores. It was Robinson who named Robin, The Boy Wonder, during a bull session with Kane and BATMAN writer Bill Finger, and it was Jerry Robinson who created the Joker. Batman's archenemy and one of the most memorable villains in comics.

In the first of this three-part interview, Jerry talks about the excitement of working in the then-infant medium of comic books, and what it was like being part of the creative team that made BATMAN one of the big success stories of the early years of comics . . .

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *You started out to be a comics writer?*

JERRY ROBINSON: No, not a comics writer. I really knew nothing about, or very little, about comics as a kid. I wanted to be a writer, a journalist, primarily and, uh, so I guess I've spent half my career, or almost, writing and drawing, or just writing. I think in the last probably fifteen to twenty years, I've done more writing with several books as well as LIFE WITH ROBINSON, the daily cartoon of social/political satire which I write and draw. I enjoy writing and the challenge

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jerry Robinson
Occupation: Comics Artist and Writer, Book Illustrator, Political Cartoonist, Author, Teacher and Comics Historian
Born: Trenton, New Jersey
Residence:New York City
Credits: Penciller, Inker and Cover Artist on BATMAN from 1939-1947; worked with **Mort Meskin** on a number of strips including JOHNNY QUICK and VIGILANTE for National during the late 1940s and '50s; artist on such strips as ATOMAN, FIGHTING YANK, BLACK TERROR, LASSIE, BAT MASTERSON, ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE, NANCY PARKER, many titles of science fiction, crime, war, romance with **Stan Lee**; and various others for several companies during the '40s through the '50s; created the science fiction strip JET SCOTT for the NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE syndicate; did the STILL LIFE daily panel of political satire, FLUBS & FLUFFS, and CARICATURES BY ROBINSON for the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate; LIFE WITH ROBINSON, a daily political cartoon is currently syndicated by Robinson's own Cartoonist's and Writer's Syndicate.

Consulting Director and wrote the catalog for the trend-setting GRAHAM GALLERY comic-art exhibition in the early '70s, and contributed articles for the Whitney Museum comic-art show in 1983. In the late '70s, organized and curated the CARTOON art show at the Kennedy Center, which was the largest exhibit of comic art to date in the United States.

Among 30 published works are: THE COMICS: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF COMIC STRIP ART (Putnam), SKIPPY AND PERCY CROSBY (Holt, Rinehart & Winston), THE 1970s: BEST POLITICAL CARTOONS OF THE DECADE (McGraw Hill), THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMICS QUIZ (Grosset & Dunlap), PROFESSOR EGGHEAD'S BEST RIDDLES (Simon and Schuster), and three collections of FLUBBS & FLUFFS (Fawcett, Scholastic).

Served as president of both the National Cartoonist's Society and the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists. Currently, Foreign Affairs Chairman for AAEC, Cartoon Editor of the PROVINCETOWN ARTS, and lectures on the Cartoon Arts at the New School in New York. Serves on the Advisory Board of the Museum of Cartoon Art in Porchester, New York; The Castle Hill School of Arts in Truro, Massachusetts, the Museum Cartoon in Basel, Switzerland.

Awards: International Salon of Humor, Italy: Presidente Senato della Republica. Overseas Press Club: Citation for Best Cartoon on Foreign Affairs. International Salon of Cartoons, Canada: One of six selected to represent the United States.
NCS Reuben Awards:
Best Comic Book Artist
Best Panel STILL LIFE
Best Special Feature FLUBS & FLUFFS
Nominated six times as one of best in his category

grounds and did lettering for BATMAN."

ROBINSON

of writing for different genres . . . political satire, history, biography. I'm now collaborating on the book and lyrics for a musical that should interest comics aficionados, if we ever get it produced. It has elements of fantasy, sci-fi and political/social satire. I've illustrated and written a lot of children's books, but I've always been especially devoted to the comics, I guess.

STEVE: *Did you curate the Graham Gallery exhibition in 1973?*

JERRY: Yes, together with **Georgia Reilly** of the Graham Gallery. It was their first in the field of comic art and was probably a turning point in the acceptance of comic art in fine art galleries and museums.

STEVE: *Did they come to you or did you come to them?*

JERRY: Somebody referred them to me. I think one of the Graham Gallery artists, the sculptor **Sidney Simon,** a good friend who knew of my involvement in the comics over the years. **Bob Graham** expressed his interest to me in exploring the possibility of handling comic art and of mounting a major show. Of course this was a very exciting idea for me to introduce comic art to the Madison Avenue art world. Before that, at one time, while president of the National Cartoonists Society, we made some serious attempts — none were successful — to have a major show of cartooning at the Metropolitan Museum of Art which would have been a landmark show. Without going into all the ramifications of that effort, it didn't materialize, although we had a number of talks with **Thomas Hoving**, at that time director of the Met, and with **Henry Geldzahler**, who was then one of his principal curators. They were most intrigued with the proposal and it came very close to fruition. Around that time, there was a major show in France on the comics at the Louvre. . .

STEVE: *This is the mid-Seventies?*

JERRY: No, I think it was earlier than that.

STEVE: *Yeah, because I know there are some comics artists hanging in the Louvre still, Burne Hogarth, Neal Adams, I think Joe Kubert.*

JERRY: This was in the late '60s I know, because that was when I was heading the National Cartoonists Society. I felt that the recognition of the comics as a legitimate art form was something that was going to happen, that comic art should be appreciated for its art as well as its cultural and sociological influence. I had also begun to lecture at schools and colleges, which I still do, on various subjects, such as, the history of the comic strip, the development of the superhero, and political satire.

The Graham cartoon show was the first at a major private gallery. It was favorably reviewed everywhere, including THE NEW YORK TIMES. People came from the Whitney and the other major museums. We had two full floors, and the show covered most of the genres of the comics, the comic book was just one part of it. It included, I recall, editorial cartoons, comic strips, caricature, and comic books. I wrote a rather extensive catalog for the show which surprisingly sold out. The Graham got calls for the catalog from all over the country. I think that gave me the idea that perhaps there was an audience for somewhat serious writing on comic art.

STEVE: *Did this lead to the book you did on strips?*

JERRY: Yeah, I think almost on the heels of that. In fact, I think I used some of the material that I had written for the catalog and adapted and expanded it for the book, THE COMICS: An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art. That took about three years to research and write. In the meantime, I was special consultant for another show for the National Endowment for the Arts at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. which even exceeded the Graham Gallery show in scope. We had a whole floor of the Kennedy Center which was like two football fields, and was incredible. We had a budget of a hundred thousand dollars, not an inconsiderable sum now but I guess that must have been about ten years ago. The Director of the

"We had a whole floor of the Kennedy

The influence of Simon and Kirby can be seen in this page of Jerry's and Mort Meskin's from THE BLACK TERROR.

Center said they had more attendance for that show than any previous exhibition.

STEVE: *How many pieces were in the show?*

JERRY: Oh, we had almost five hundred. We also did an elaborate catalog. We broke it down even further into various categories: comic strips, comic book, political cartoons, magazine cartoons (we also had a section for that in the Graham show), THE NEW YORKER, etc., and also television, and a special section of contemporary painting . . . pop artists and other modern painters who used comic idiom in their work which interested us because it showed the pervasive influence of the artform in our whole culture.

Each section was a comprehensive review of that area of comics, what could ordinarily have been an exhibition unto itself. We had a designer do the various units. The fine art structure, for example, displayed the painting and an original of the cartoon from which it derived. There were **Ramos, Warhol, Jasper Johns, Fahlstrom, Lichtenstein . . .**

STEVE: *Do you like Lichtenstein's stuff?*

JERRY: Yeah, a lot of it, I do. I had him as a guest one time at the National Cartoonists Society to confront those who thought that he was just taking comic art and exploiting it. But he is a serious artist and I think it's no different than other artists drawing upon elements of their environment in their art . . . as **Picasso, Braque, Oldenburg, Stuart Davis** and many other artists have done in various ways.

STEVE: *Lichtenstein used to work in comics, I believe.*

JERRY: I don't think he ever worked in comics.

STEVE: *I was misinformed.*

JERRY: I may be. For a couple of years I had the idea of having a painter or some noted artist design a poster for our annual NCS awards dinner. And so I thought **Lichtenstein** would be an ideal choice for one, and got together with him. He agreed to do the design for the poster for that year. It was a space ship flying over the New York City skyline with a balloon saying: "That's the place!" "NCS Annual Reuben Awards at the Plaza Hotel" was incorporated in the design, which he asked me to complete. It should be a collectors' item — every member of the society received a print. Anyway, this is getting sidetracked from the exhibition.

At the show, as I recall, it was **Ramos** who did a painting of the Joker which was based on the cover of the Joker for BATMAN which I did back in the Forties. And when we got hold of that painting, I thought, hey great, we'll put the painting on one wall and facing it, the original comic art from which it was derived. When it arrived, it was insured for maybe a hundred and fifty thousand dollars or so, and facing it I placed the cover for which I probably got a hundred and fifty dollars. It struck me with great irony. How little esteem comic art is generally held in our society.

STEVE: *That hardly seems fair.*

JERRY: So I thought. I still have that cover — would that it was worth as much as the **Ramos**!.

STEVE: *Do you have much of your work from the old days?*

JERRY: I have some that I saved, but in the early days almost all of it was destroyed because of the sheer volume. Nobody really attached any intrinsic value to originals. Almost the only ones saved were those we especially liked aesthetically, you know, and didn't want to destroy. I remember specifically a number of occasions where I did a cover or a story that I particularly liked and I would have to call up the engraver, while I was working at National Periodical Publications and tell them not to destroy it but send it back. Sometimes we got a piece of art back because we were adapting it for a cover or for some other mechanical reason. We would often swap, like I remember exchanging art with **Jack Kirby** and **Joe Simon** and **Joe Shuster,** and with **Fred Ray**, who did most of the SUPERMAN covers at that time. We would just put them on the wall of our studio. I remember one studio I shared with a couple of artists which had literally every square inch

Center and a $100,000.00 budget."

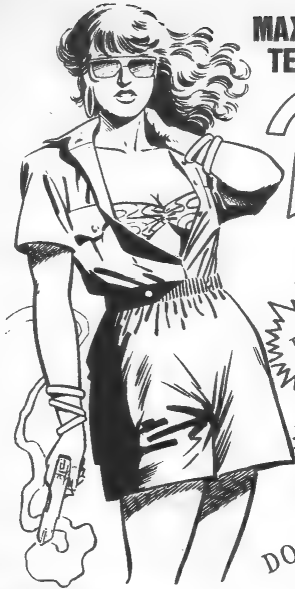
covered with original comic art . . . but just because we liked them. Probably as many times as we moved studios, some would be left behind.

STEVE: *When you were working on BATMAN, after you got on as Kane's assistant, were you designing a lot of the covers?*

JERRY: I don't know how many, but I did quite a few, because I particularly enjoyed doing the covers. I would work closely with **Whit Elsworth**, the editor, a cartoonist himself originally. He had a good appreciation of design, and I was given pretty much of a free hand and he was the only one I consulted with on the art. We were trying to do something special with the covers in terms of the graphics. We were starting off with the premise that, you know, comic books were still relatively new. We were still trying to attract an audience . . . to expand, get space on the newsstands, to have it noticed, particularly when a plethora of books began to be published. Hundreds of titles were fighting for space.

STEVE: *That must have been much worse back in the Forties when there were so many other companies competing.*

JERRY: Yeah, it was, it was . . . So, our idea, and the things that I liked to do, were very posterish and symbolic. A lot of the other covers were scenes from a particular episode, and had a lot going on. Our idea was to have a strong visual impact, even from a distance and have a very strong element of design. Looking back on at least most of the ones I've seen over the years that we produced, I think they fell in that category. I have a couple I can show you that I did save . . . I exchanged some very good Superman covers that I liked that Fred did, some of the classic ones. The



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"We lived, breathed, ate and slept BATMAN."

one of Superman breaching Fortess Europe under the Nazis, twisting a Nazi cannon. Also the one with the big shield and a full figure of Superman with an eagle.

STEVE: *Yes, that was in Steranko's history, I think.*

JERRY: Yeah, I think I lent it to him and quite a few others for his book. He spent about a week in my studio going through it all.

STEVE: *I was astonished to see that original sketches you did of Robin and The Joker, apparently on a napkin or something.*

JERRY: Yeah, one of them was from a class at Columbia, as I said, I started to be a journalist, and I was going to Columbia Journalism, and we unearthed it. It was in one of my notebooks from psychology class or something. I think I was practicing doing Batman on my notes because I'd started with Bob at that time.

STEVE: *Batman had already been created when you came in as Kane's assistant; you were about 17 or 18?*

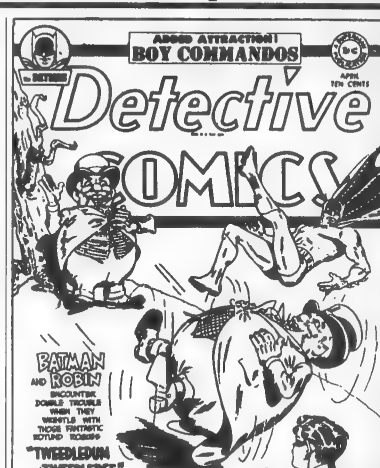
JERRY: Seventeen.

STEVE: *And you brought the Joker to him, didn't you?*

JERRY: Well, what happened, was, I think **Steranko** told the most accurate story...he was very meticulous about tracking down the details...I think he also interviewed **Bill Finger**. I wanted to write a story for BATMAN and I was hounding Bob to contribute a script. BATMAN was then beginning to become very successful and more stories were needed than Bill could do alone. I wanted to write it not only for BATMAN but for my Columbia journalism class. Of course, you know, we were always tossing around ideas for scripts, Bob and Bill and myself. I think that was part of the success of the strip. We had a very, very close rapport then. We lived, breathed, ate and slept BATMAN — whenever we did sleep, which wasn't very much. It was all-consuming and the only way I got away from it at all was when I went to class, and still, at that time I was just seeing the comics as a way to put myself through college. I came to New York just to get this job with Bob. When I met Bob and he offered me a job as his assistant, I had just graduated from high school.

STEVE: *How did you meet Bob?*

JERRY: I met him, just by chance, at a country resort. I had gone away for a week — which was all I could afford — to kind of fatten up before I went to college, at my folks' insistence. I had been selling ice cream all summer, on a bicycle with a cart behind. I think I was averaging about



$17.00 a week, which at that time was still not very much. *(Laughter.)* But over a summer of work I accumulated $200.00 and so they finally persuaded me to take twenty five dollars of it, which is what it cost to go away for a week at that time with meals and everything, which I was still reluctant to do! Selling ice cream, pedalling all over town in the hot sun all day, was hard-earned money. This story has appeared before...you haven't read it?

STEVE: *No.*

JERRY: I was wearing a painters' jacket which was then in vogue in high schools. It was white...

STEVE: *Like a smock?*

JERRY: Yeah, almost like a smock, but with buttons and a lot of pockets for painters' supplies; it was a house painter's jacket. I grew up in Trenton, New Jersey, and Princeton University was near by. I was on the high school tennis team. We were always trying to imitate the older college kids, you know. The vogue was to cover the jacket with slogans and cartoons. So I drew, of course, my own cartoons. I had drawn cartoons for the high school paper, although I never took any art classes — probably because you didn't get any college credits for art in those days.

So, I went out the very first day at the resort to the tennis courts, and I used that painter's jacket as a tennis jacket. I probably would not be sitting here today, if just at the moment, Bob, who was watching the tennis, noticed the cartoons. I don't think he ever played so I don't know what the hell he was doing at the tennis court. He just struck up a conversation, asking me who did the cartoons on the jacket. I admitted that I had, and I didn't know what was coming next, but he was apparently intrigued. I'm sure they

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THE 25th CENTURY. THEY NEED NO DEATH PENALTY. THEY HAVE

CYCOPS™

Dear Chuck:

You've got to be kidding! The Cycops as presidential Storm Troopers? Come on! Still, if you've got doubts, I'll try to set your mind at ease.

First, the Cycop Force is a division of the Interstellar Bureau of Criminal Investigation. The IBCI answers to the Department of Interstellar Justice. Yes, I know you know that. The point is, I'm not even in the chain of command. The accusation that the Cycops are my private army -- well, that's absurd.

The Cycops' true purpose is the same as it's been for the last 50 years: the protection of human rights. That's what we're here for, that's why the Human Coalition was formed: to guarantee civil rights on all worlds inhabited by humans. The Cycops make damn sure we all do our jobs.

To answer your questions about the Cycops, themselves: no, they aren't supermen. Yes, a Cycop can lift 2000 pounds. He can punch a hole through two inches of dura-steel. He can fight an army single-handedly. But only in Overdrive. The rest of the time, he's no stronger than you or I. And he can't stay in Overdrive longer than 30 minutes, because the stress will kill him.

As for the M-suits: I can't believe you swallowed that rumor about invincible armored warriors waiting to overthrow the Coalition. The Cycops' M-suits are designed to absorb impact. Otherwise, if a 'cop tried to put his fist through a two-inch dura-steel plate, he'd break every bone in his hand. The suit would also provide extra skeletal support if he tried to lift 2000 pounds. But an M-suit won't stop beam weapons -- like blazers -- so it hardly makes a Cycop invulnerable.

Now, about their internal computers: you've got that part right -- there probably isn't a computer system around that a Cycop and his comp can't break into. That's why we formed the Cycop Force in the first place (you'd be surprised at the kind of incriminating evidence some people will store in a computer). But in order to get that evidence in spite of sophisticated security programs, you need a computer which is pretty sophisticated, itself. And we just don't build them any more sophisticated than the one in a Cycop's skull.

I can't really tell you exactly how the process works -- I'm not a cybernetics expert -- but the 'tecs implant a tiny seed (more like a virus, really) in the brain of the future 'cop. That seed grows into a network that twines all through the brain tissue. No strand of that network is thicker than a few molecules, yet it interfaces with the Cycop's own nervous system. The result is a computer of extraordinary power and abilities.

Using the comp's control over his involuntary nervous system, a Cycop can go into Overdrive, or block out pain. It's also the computer that makes him inhumanly accurate with weapons, and that gives him access to data from the sensors implanted throughout his body.

I must agree with you that the cost is very high. I don't like the idea of drafting five-year-olds any more than you do. Unfortunately, the implant process tends to kill anybody over six. The decision to use orphans because of that mortality rate was cold-blooded, but it was also necessary to protect the government from lawsuits by any relatives of the children.

There is no doubt, however, of the benefits of the twelve years of training these children receive at Cycop Academy. All that martial arts and weapons instruction, as well as the classes in criminal law and programming, results in superb officers. Of course, it hardly makes for a normal childhood....

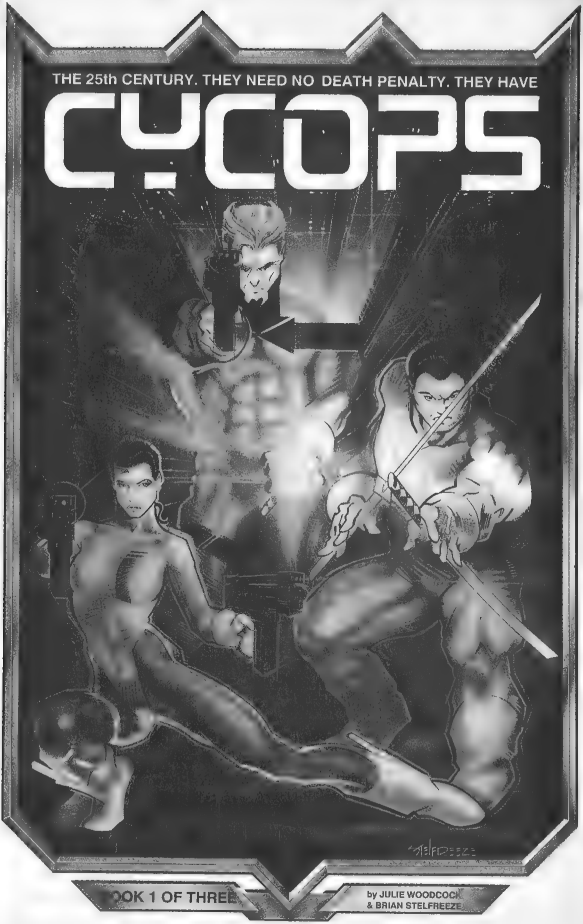
It's also unfortunate that one of the effects of Overdrive is the greatly reduced lifespan, but that was the price we had to pay. It's as if they live twice the life of the rest of us, so they live only half as long.

In short, Chuck, I really don't think the Cycops deserve your fear. What they do deserve is your gratitude.

And, perhaps, your sympathy.

-- President Dale Kamdr
September 29, 2453

JULIE WOODCOCK & BRIAN STELFREE


THE 25th CENTURY. THEY NEED NO DEATH PENALTY. THEY HAVE
CYCOPS
OOK 1 OF THREE
by JULIE WOODCOCK
& BRIAN STELFREEZE

"The pay was not very good but I was a

weren't that great, but at least they were mine. As the week went on, we got to be friends. He was older, about eight or ten years. When he introduced himself, he said he was a cartoonist and he was very excited about his new feature, BATMAN. I had to admit that, much to his chagrin, I had never heard of it.

STEVE: *Oh, so it was very new?*

JERRY: Oh, yeah, it was very new. I think it started earlier that year in June, July, August, you could research it.

STEVE: *It was '38 wasn't it?*

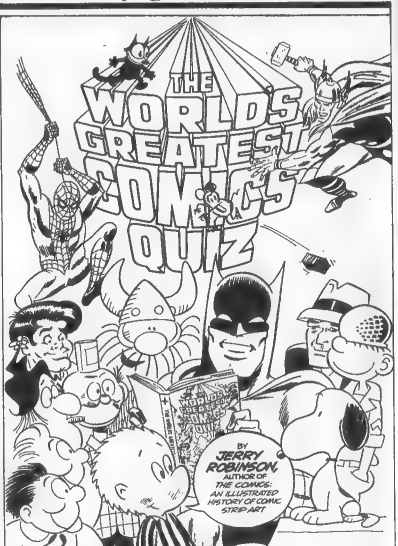
JERRY: No, it was '39. SUPERMAN was '38. . . so, it was sometime in '39. I think there was not more than a couple of issues out, at that point. We took a stroll down to the little village nearby and found a candy store that had it. I must say, my first reaction, I wasn't terribly impressed. The only comics I had known — I'd never seen a comic book before — was the Sunday comics. I liked **Foster** and **Caniff**, and a lot of the humor strips. **Caniff** has been my model for the best in art and storytelling since then. As a kid, I did read them avidly.

Later, as it developed, Bob said he needed an assistant, that BATMAN was getting successful. When he learned that I was going to go to Syracuse University to study journalism, he said: "Well, that's too bad — if you were coming to New York I could offer you a job." And I think maybe it was like $25. a week or so, and I had just finished selling ice cream for $17. a week all summer, so that sounded like a lot of money, enough that I could actually live on. So I immediately switched to Columbia, where I had also been admitted. I didn't even go home but went straight to New York, got a room and started studying at Columbia and working for Bob. So that's how this whole tragic story began.

STEVE: *When you were working for Bob, what were your duties?*

JERRY: Well, at the very beginning, I just inked backgrounds, did lettering and some background figures, I would say, for some months, until I became more proficient. It was something I found I really enjoyed doing, and a tremendous challenge for a novice, though I didn't think of it seriously as a career, yet. I don't think I did for a year or two, perhaps until I began to get more and more responsibility. Then I began to see it as an exiting medium where I could write and draw as a career, although I continued to study journalism. Gradually, I began to do most of the inking, Bob just reserved some of the Batman figures, and eventually he abandoned that, and so I would ink the complete story as well as the lettering. We were pressed to turn out more work, so Bob had to pencil very rough, which was good for me because then I had to do more and more drawing, you know, because I'd have to flesh out the figures and complete the backgrounds and so forth. So it was marvelous training and it was a very exciting period.

Then, not long after that, I began to pencil stories and ink them on my own, while I continued to ink some of Bob's. Later I just pencilled and inked my own stories and covers.

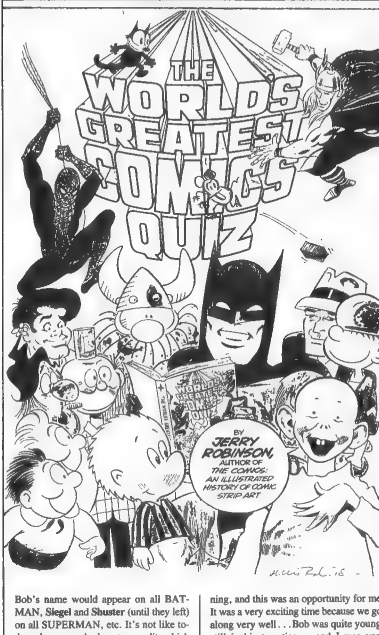


Above: The original cover for Jerry's "World's Greatest Comics Quiz." Compare to the finished version, in which Jerry had to substitute the Yellow Kid, who is in public domain, for Snoopy, when the syndicate denied him the rights.

By this time I was working directly for National rather than for Bob. The company hired me. Now everybody was trying to imitate BATMAN's success. I know that Bill got offers from other publishers as I did. But I never did leave DC until I left BATMAN.

While there, however, I did some other features, as I wanted to do some other things besides BATMAN. So I moonlighted for some other publishers and some of it was not under my own name. In those days, they enforced the rule that no credits were given, except the original artist.

kid learning...It was very exciting."



Bob's name would appear on all BATMAN, **Siegel** and **Shuster** (until they left) on all SUPERMAN, etc. It's not like today where everybody gets a credit, which I think is right. But they had the theory that the public would be disappointed if it was to learn that the creators weren't doing all the drawing. It was the same thinking inherited from the earlier newspaper comic strip custom, where the creator could have died 30 years before, but they'd still carry his name on it and not the current artist.

STEVE: *What was Bob like to work for?*

JERRY: Well, the first few years I worked very closely with Bob, before I started working directly for the company. The pay was not very good but I was a kid learning, and this was an opportunity for me. It was a very exciting time because we got along very well...Bob was quite young, still in his twenties,...and I was very young. I think I was kind of his protege' at that point. I got a room near where he lived and worked...we were together practically all the time. We'd talk about nothing but comics and ideas for the strip and how to develop new characters. I didn't know anyone else in the field except **Bill Finger.** I think I first met **Will Eisner** at that time, and a few others.

It wasn't until I began to work directly for DC that I met some of the other younger artists, more my contemporaries, like **Fred Ray**. I became friends with **Joe Shuster** and **Jack Kirby**, who worked at the next desks. It was a very good group, I think, at that time. Besides Bob, who worked at his apartment, there were **Siegel** and **Shuster, Simon** and **Kirby,** and **Fred Ray,** and a number of other top artists including **Mort Meskin, Bernie Klein, George Roussos, Cliff Young** and **Stan Kaye.** Also, **Craig Flessel,** who worked in his own studio.

STEVE: *Was there an actual bullpen up at National at the time?*

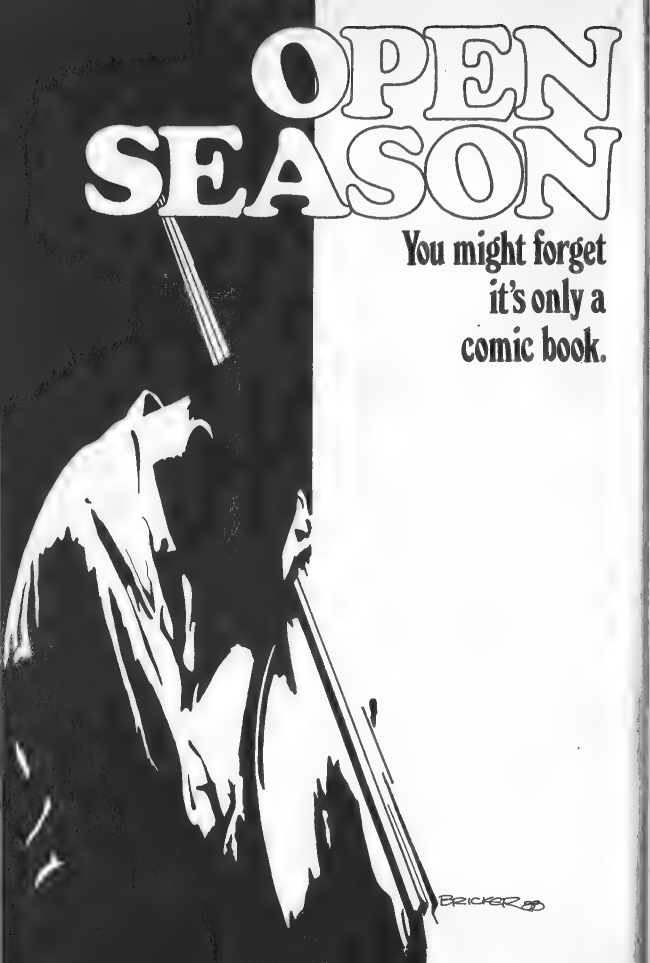
JERRY: Yes. There was a large art room, where we literally had our drawing boards next to one another.

STEVE: *Why don't you give your impressions of Bill Finger?*

JERRY: Well, I spent a lot of time with Bill, too. I guess, as a kid, I became both Bill and Bob's confidantes, in a way. And them mine, perhaps, also. I would go out with Bill a lot. He was single when we first met. Bill was, within my experience, the best writer of comic strips, certainly in the comic book field and perhaps also in syndication with few exceptions. I deeply regret Bill never received the credit or the rewards he deserved during his lifetime from Bob or the DC publishers and editors. He was very committed and as concerned about his work as any serious novelist. And he was also a fine collaborator. I mean, you could give Bill the nucleus of an idea, and he would be able to run with it...and with his craftsmanship, form even a bizarre idea into a good, logical sequence.

STEVE: *Can you remember anything about the way he worked?*

JERRY: Well, in terms of reference material. I can tell you a point about how Bill worked. I think it illustrates some of his methods. He thought visually, and I think he knew a lot of the problems that we would have as the artists, or what kind of things would draw well. You know just like a screen writer knows what you can put on a screen and what you can't, what would work well, and what would not. It is a big help to the director to start with something that's filmable. Well, that's the way Bill was...he would do very good scripts, not only in the construction of the stories, but they would be visual. If he had a story set on a ship — for example, a luxury liner — he would go out and get actual shots of luxury liners from tourist bureaus, libraries, etc., schematics of decks and what not. He would then choreograph the movement around the actual set, so the action would work...the overhead boom was there, you can get at it from the second deck and you'd land on this section and so forth. All that reference that he dug up during the writing


OPEN
SEASON
You might forget
it's only a
comic book.
BRICKER

"Bill Finger would choreograph the movement."

of the story, he would attach to the script.

STEVE: *Did Finger work full script or would he give you a written breakdown and then supply the dialogue later?*

JERRY: Bill's scripts were complete with scene description, captions and dialogue, as were the scripts by all the writers who later worked on BATMAN. Most of the stories of BATMAN were, I think, very well-plotted, far better written than most all its competition in the comics. I think a great deal of the reason for BATMAN's success was that. If it didn't have as good writing and good character development, I don't think BATMAN would have taken off as it did. I think that first Joker story is a case in point. As I say, I wanted to write for the strip and I think it was just at that time the first BATMAN quarterly was contemplated .

STEVE: *It was a spinoff from DETECTIVE?*

JERRY: Right, exactly. And so there was no problem in generating enough scripts while we were doing one story a month for DETECTIVE. Although, when I first started working for Bob, he was still doing a couple of other subsidiary strips like CLIP CARSON — remember that? I also assisted on that.

STEVE: *The explorer strip?*

JERRY: Yeah, and I forget what else we handled. I think also RUSTY AND HIS PALS. I was still able to carry on my work at school, and then the first quarterly book was contemplated and suddenly we had to turn out four extra stories, which was a lot — they were 13 pages each at that time So, for the BATMAN book, 64 pages, we would do four BATMAN stories and then, later, we added Alfred, a four pager. I told Bob I was going to contribute a BATMAN

Bob Kane's Batman

script I still remember that same night I went back to my room to start writing. My idea, I guess it was born out of what I was concurrently studying in my creative writing classes. Most of the heroes of literature and mythology that I could recall had great antagonists . . . Moriarty vs. Sherlock Holmes, etc. And the first thing I thought of doing — and this is interesting in retrospect — was to create a villain, before I even began to think of the story line. That was my thought. . . that I wanted to add a major villain to the strip. If you look back at that time, Batman was fighting small-time crooks, smugglers, extortionists whatever. And they would be disposed of. . .not really worthy of a reprise, you know

They were corny, drawn from crimes of the 1920s and '30s . . . prohibition bank robbers and hijacking, that kind of thing. The era that produced the **Dillingers** — and **Dick Tracy**.

STEVE: *Gangster movies?*

JERRY: Right, and they reflected the times very well and provided good action, and they were adequate foils for BATMAN. But I remember we had endless discussions on why we felt Batman was a better concept than Superman. We kind of felt a rivalry. SUPERMAN had been selling the most, but we were creeping up. We felt that the invulnerability of Superman was an inherent weakness. And they could never have the strongest stories, because nothing could really happen to Superman, so you could never have the same intensity, the suspense. So we felt that Batman was a stronger concept, because of his vulnerability and that he wasn't a super-character And I think it was the right analysis at that time.

But there was also a dichotomy in our thinking about BATMAN. I remember discussing it with Bob and Bill. I believed that the stronger the villain, the antagonist, the stronger Batman would be, but there was a concern that if the villains were too strong it would overpower and detract from the hero Therefore, Batman was the one to focus on. It may be obvious in retrospect, but at that time it wasn't so clear. Although I was playing the Devil's advocate and felt a strong villian would enrich the strip, none of us could be sure of that. But I did have the precedents in literature.

Anyway, I knew that I wanted to have a major villain in my script, although I don't think at that moment I could have foreseen a continuing villain, endlessly. But at least one villain strong enough to have a series and one that would test BAT-

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N-N-NO! I SWEAR! I TRIED TO CASH IN ON THE MURDER, FIGURING RIGHTLY I WOULD PAY UP "PROTECTION" MONEY FASTER! BUT I DIDN'T KILL HER-I SWEAR!

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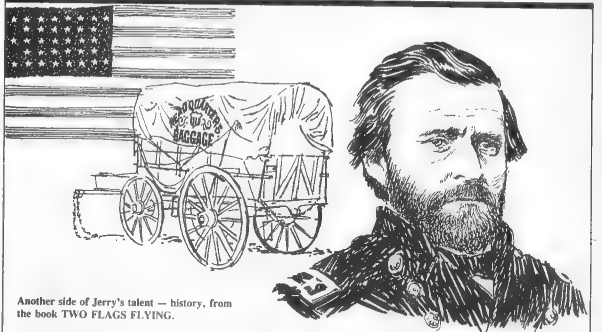
KILGORE

FROM-

Renegade Press

"I hit on the idea of The Joker as his name."



Another side of Jerry's talent — history, from the book TWO FLAGS FLYING.

MAN to the limit and even, at times, best him. A lot of my own writing was in the vein of satire and humor. That's what I liked to do for my high school paper and later for the Columbia Journalism class. I loved to write short stories: **De Maupassant** twist endings intrigued me. So I guess it was natural for me to think of some villain that had a sense of humor. I thought a villain with some internal contradiction would be intriguing... somebody who could be villainous and yet have a sense of humor... be dangerous and yet be not altogether unlikeable. And the next thought was how he would look. He had to be bizarre... striking-visually. These thoughts came very quickly that night.

I was trying to think of a name and I thought, well, he's got a sense of humor, he's a joker. The actual progression of thoughts was something like that because, when I hit on the idea of the Joker as the name, I immediately thought of the joker playing card. I think it was a lucky association, because the joker playing card has a lot of historical symbolism attached to it. There've been jokers through the ages, court jesters...

STEVE: *Like the Trickster in mythology.*

JERRY: Yes, exactly, so it had a very sound basis, although I didn't think of it in those terms. I remember searching frantically that night for a deck of cards, where I could find a joker to base the visual on. Somehow, I felt I couldn't continue with the script, until I could actually see him. When I finally unearthed that deck of cards with that classic joker image, in the middle of the night, I immediately sketched the Joker's head.

STEVE: *Was that the sketch that was in the Steranko History?*

JERRY: That was the sketch I did that night.

STEVE: *That Joker face looks exactly the way he looks now.*

JERRY: Well, almost. If you look at the joker card, yeah, they're very close. I began to flesh out the concept for his personality. I had nothing of the plot, except a general idea for the first story. I knew he would taunt Batman... be a joker, a villainous prankster, in a kind of sardonic way and visually bizarre and look like the joker playing card. And his calling card was, of course, a joker. That's about as far as I got that first night.

I was up all night, I was very excited about it. I couldn't wait to see Bob the next morning and tell him about the idea for the script I was writing, and the new villain. Well, he loved it and immediately saw its potential. It was solid. That was another, I think, great facility of Bob's. He came up with a lot of good ideas, of course, himself, but he never rejected something out of hand because it wasn't his idea. If you gave him an idea he would be able to run with it, embellish it and translate an abstract concept into visual terms.

Shortly thereafter, Bill came over and he thought the Joker idea was great. In fact, we all liked it so much we determined that we'd do it for the first BATMAN quarterly, which was just then in the works. I think maybe we had one story done for that issue already, or something like that. Then came the tragedy for me, because what I had done was create a Frankenstein. I had created an idea that was so good that they immediately wanted to use it and have Bill write it, for that first issue.

STEVE: *You must have felt awful.*

JERRY: Well, as you can imagine, that's just how I felt. I was really heartsick and I argued for some time, but really without too much conviction, because I was really torn. I was really dedicated to BATMAN, and I knew that by all odds Bill was far better-suited to write that story. I might

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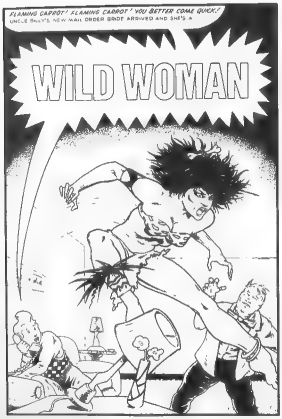

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"I was really heartsick . . . I was torn."

have spent weeks on this, my first story, writing it part-time, 13 pages. Maybe less, but Bill could turn it out that week and he was a great writer. Although I didn't want to relinquish my baby, I finally agreed

I guess it was such a profound disappointment that I don't think I tried to write another thing for comics for a couple of years. I concentrated on the drawing, and my writing outside of the comics. But I was elated that my idea was used . . the first little thing that I created would then be part of BATMAN.

We discussed that first story there. I guess this is also a perfect example of how good Bill was . . that first story turned out so great that it was used in that first issue as the lead story. The idea of the playing card was adapted and of course the Joker's white face was only because I kept the white clown face from the playing card. There was no reason for it except, we said, "Hey, it really looks bizarre, let's keep it white!" It was only years later, long after I left Batman, there was an explanation of some chemical accident or something.

STEVE: *He was swimming through chemicals. I think it dyed his skin.*

JERRY: Yeah, we never even attempted to explain those things. Once you explain it, it loses the intrigue. That was something I don't think we would've done. Some things should be left a mystery

STEVE: *I think that was done during the '50s when the stories were sort of bland.*

JERRY: Bill took as much as I had on it, the concept, and used the closed room idea, a classic one, for that first Joker story, which was perfect to establish his character

STEVE: *Where he was poisoning everybody . . .*

JERRY: Yeah. How does he get in the closed room to commit the crime? The Joker predicts he'll kill at an exact time and Batman can't stop him. They posted policemen around the room, the clock chimes the hour and he topples over dead. At the appointed hour the victim answered the phone with a poisoned needle planted in the earpiece. It was a situation that writers, mystery writers, have always tried for a new solution . . . so the selection of that plot for the first Joker story was very important . . . it kind of set the persona of the Joker . . . if that story was not done well, the Joker might have not had the same initial impact

STEVE: *What about Robin? You were responsible for his creation . . .*

JERRY: No, no, I was not. I can't take credit for that. As I reconstructed it and Bill confirmed my recollection, Bob and Bill had the idea of adding a kid and discussed the idea before I arrived. When I came in that particular day, they were already working on the idea of adding a boy to the strip. We had a long session of naming him. We compiled a long list of possible names, including some, I think, that Bill came in with twenty or thirty names such as Mercury and other mythological characters I can't remember the other ones, but they were all of that

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"The first Joker story was very important."

genre and none of them kind of clicked with me. They didn't seem quite right for the boy and didn't fit in with what I thought was the premise about Batman itself because they were not super-characters. So I argued against anything that was derived from a mythological character. I was seeking an identity as human as possible but an interesting name, but I didn't know what.

We were all arguing for our choice and it came down to a couple and there still wasn't one that anyone was too enthused about. I was seeking something more human. I don't know how these ideas come to mind, but I said: "How about Robin?" Robin Hood was the inspiration for it. We wrote it down. I don't know if it was Bill or Bob who was not enthusiastic at first, but after some discussion, it was agreed that it best suited Batman and the concept of the boy. So that was my contribution, naming Robin.

Then, in designing the costume, I remember specifically Bob was at the drawing board visualizing the boy and when we decided on the name Robin, I suggested adapting the Robin Hood costume. We were all making suggestions to Bob who was actually drawing the first concept of the boy and costume. We experimented with it. Of course we want a cape, like Batman's cape, and I remember Bob did the pants with the indication of mesh.

STEVE: *It was supposed to be chain mail?*

JERRY: Yes. Bob added the little extension on the back of the shoe which added to the illusion of speed when in action. I remember I added the insignia "R" on his vest. If you look at the strip, it was the little innovation that I had added when I did the lettering. At the start of a caption I would do a little fancy letter like the R on Robin's vest. It was the equivalent, in a way, with Batman's insignia on his chest. Again we thought, like the Joker, that we had something exciting and Robin was given a big splash cover introduction. I recall that cover, smashing through the hoop...

STEVE: *Yeah, like a circus.*

JERRY: Yeah, and that was mostly Bill's original story. But he wrote all the stories, certainly in the first years. And created most, if not all of the great early villians after the Joker

STEVE: *Well, who was responsible first for the idea of gianism, of giant typewriters and pool tables and things like that that got worked into the Batman strip?*

JERRY: I just never thought about that, nobody asked me that before, as I can recall.

STEVE: *I remember reading something about either you or Bob Kane or Bill Finger had seen a photo of this giant typewriter that was built for an industrial exposition and you worked into the story and the idea caught on and the theme was used many times. I remember, I think it*

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CATCH THEIR ACT!
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from
FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS

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"Bill Finger wrote all the stories."

was a Penguin story, where Batman was fighting the bad guys on a giant pool table.

JERRY: But wasn't that just a splash panel?

STEVE: *No.*

JERRY: It wasn't just symbolic?

STEVE: *No, it was an actual element in the story.*

JERRY: It might have derived from our symbolic covers of splash pages. The idea of a giant thing that symbolically represented the theme of the story. It might have developed from that and maybe the typewriter story was true, too. You know, a lot of things developed at once. For example, I read, maybe **Steranko** wrote it or somebody else, when they interviewed Bill about the Joker, he said part of the development of the character was influenced by **Conrad Veidt** in . . .

STEVE: *THE MAN WHO LAUGHED.*

JERRY: THE MAN WHO LAUGHED. Well, that was true in part, but that came after the fact.

STEVE: *How? You looked at the photographs of Veidt and said: "Hey, he looks like the Joker"?*

JERRY: Exactly. Its an example of how Bill would work . . . very visually. He made natural associations which reinforced the concept . . as did **Conrad Veidt** in THE MAN WHO LAUGHED. It helped Bill to conceptualize the character. So it was true, in part. And it's possible that we were doing the giant idea in splash panels and it was natural to incorporate it in a story. .I think Bob began to do those symbolic splash pages quite early. I remember an early Joker story which I did — the Joker was a florist. The name of the story was, "Slay 'em with Flowers" and for the first page splash panel, and adapted for the cover, I did a giant watering can with the Joker watering the flowers, one of which was Robin . . something like that. What we would do was take the theme of the story and symbolize it some way with some elements that made a good striking graphic. That was done fairly early on in the poster-like covers as well as in the splash panels.

STEVE: *Well, from the old days, do you have recollections of maybe a particularly funny story that happened in your studio?*

JERRY: Yes, well it wasn't mine, it was a joint studio at that time. The other participants were **Charlie Biro, Bob** and **Dick Wood, Bernie Klein,** and **George Roussos** who I believe is now coloring for Marvel and was working on BATMAN for many years inking backgrounds. George was an expert background artist.

STEVE: *Who colored BATMAN?*

JERRY: Well, I would color some of the stories that I did . . . I had the opportunity to do the coloring, working at DC. But it was usually done by a DC staff artist. There was this marvelous old illustrator at DC, **Raymond Perry.** I was a kid and never called him anything but **Mr. Perry.** He had such a wealth of experience and was a marvelous draftsman. I always felt that it was kind of tragic that he was reduced to just coloring others' art for his last years. I remember I used to love to go to his studio and get critiques and advice and so forth. Anyway, **Perry** colored a lot of those early stories. His desk was nearby and if it was a story that I did, and didn't color myself, I would discuss it with him. I usually colored the covers that I did.

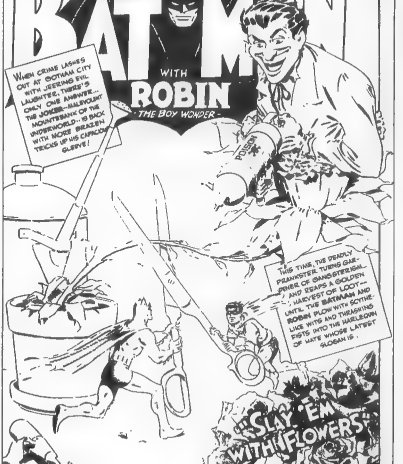
STEVE: *Would you color on the original or color on a stat or something?*

JERRY: No, on the stat. All the coloring was done on what we called silver prints.

STEVE: *That's one thing in which I think BATMAN was superior to the other strips; more attention was paid to the coloring, to the overall mood it created, all these shadows, and lots of purples and blues.*

JERRY: Yes, we did, and if we didn't color it ourselves, quite often we would add color notes, how we wanted the effects carried out. So we did pay attention, because we were very concerned with the mood which we tried to establish in the strip.

So ends Part One. In Part Two Jerry discusses the love lives of Batman's creators, how they invented the "language" of comics, and what he feels about the advent of Neal Adams' ultra-realistic Batman.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-THE BOY WONDER-
WHEN CRIME LASHES OUT AT GOTHAM CITY WITH ITS TERRIFYING EVIL LAUGHTER... ONLY ONE ANSWER!... THE JOKER—HARLEQUIN MOUNTEBANK OF THE UNDERWORLD—IS BACK IN HIS MOST BRILLIANT TRICKS OF HIS CAREER... BEWARE!
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"Our first Creation Con was in 1971."

GARY BERMAN & ADAM MALIN

Not many comics fans can turn their hobby into a career. A few, those with talent as writers or artists, became professionals, working for one of the comic-book publishers. But most can only dream of making a living from their interest in comics. Exceptions are Adam Malin and Gary Berman who, while still teenagers, organized the first Creation Convention in New York City. Today, Creation Conventions is a thriving business, organizing cons throughout the United States. We tied Adam and Gary down long enough for a brief conversation during their annual Thanksgiving weekend get-together at the Roosevelt Hotel in the Big Apple. It wasn't easy — this interview was actually done in two segments (one each with Adam and Gary) and edited together. . .

PATRICK DANIEL O'NEIL: *This is the anniversary of your first convention, right?*

ADAM MALIN: It is. Our first show was Thanksgiving weekend, 1971, at the New Yorker Hotel in Manhattan, which is currently owned by the Reverend Moon's Unification Church — if that's any indication of how long ago it was.

PAT: *Then you were what, 16?*

ADAM: I started at the age of 14.

PAT: *What made you think, at 14, that you could run a convention?*

ADAM: My parents are very progressive; they knew how much I loved comic books. I had attended numerous antique-type flea markets with them. The idea of huckstering was not new to me. In all honesty, I attended two years worth of **Phil Seuling** July Cons, and got a basis of formats there, as well. It was something to emulate and work off of.

Soon after we got into it, we began to diversify, and we like to think that now we're a healthier mix of different major media — film, television, comics, graphic arts, science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Adam Malin

Education: State University of N.Y. at Stony Brook, graduating with a degree in classical piano performance.

Favorite Comics And Comics People: John Byrne, Frank Miller, Bill Sienkiewicz, Al Williamson, Tom Yeates, Bret Blevins, NEXUS, AMERICAN FLAGG, JOHN SABLE

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gary Berman

Education: University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School of Finance, major in marketing

Favorite Films: Of all time — THE WIZARD OF OZ; IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD; More recently — RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK; CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND; E.T. I'm a real commercial person.

"I'm a big fan of PLAN NINE FROM OUT-

Gary Berman

GARY BERMAN: It was a question of knowing the things we had to know, and not knowing the things that would scare us off, so we just bowled ahead and did it.

PAT: *What do you think is the hardest lesson you had to learn through all the years of putting these together?*

GARY: I think it's a matter of balancing being a nice person, which we try to be, versus being taken advantage of by people — both customers and companies. The balance between those two — being nice in business is often very difficult.

ADAM: I can think of several hard lessons. One is that you want to make the event as wonderful as possible, and it takes a lot of money to do that. But you can spend so much money that you lose your shirt on it. The point is not to be so rambunctious as to create an event that's going to lose you money, effectively putting you out of the business. You've got to be able to do something that will at least break even, or you can't continue.

PAT: *What one thing, or series of things, has been the most fun for you over the 15 years?*

GARY: The most fun was dealing with the film companies and learning about their upcoming projects. We've been lucky getting those previews and meeting the guest stars, producers, directors, special effects people. That's been the most fun and the most educational.

ADAM: I couldn't say one thing was the most fun, but I can name some of the highlights. In comic books and graphic arts, working with the entire staff of Marvel Comics, all of those people whom I respect immensely. We've done some work with DC, but Marvel has been much more bullish with us, and it's been a pleasure working with them.

The film industry has been very exciting, and in the last three or four years we've really been concentrating on our previews with the different film companies. It's been a very enjoyable, successful endeavor as we discover, at the same time as our attendees, what is coming up, what's new, and what's interesting. I've had a great time with the media guests — the STAR TREK people, the DOCTOR WHO people, the science-fiction film-making people.

I have to put in a plug for STARLOG. The last several years, Creation has been working with **Kerry O'Quinn** and the people of STARLOG Magazine. This has been a fabulous experience and Kerry is a tremendous entity, who helps make the whole STARLOG experience happen. He's a media guru himself. Working with them, we've put on some of our best shows, particularly out on the West Coast. It's been very fulfilling to us as fans.

PAT: *Over the course of years, nothing really runs completely smoothly, we all know that. Can you think of any time that someone has had a complaint about something you've done, where you honestly felt they had a point and you set out to solve the problem?*

ADAM: I think people have a lot of constructive criticisms about Creation, some of which I empathize with, some of which may be valid criticisms, to a point, but are unavoidable because of the way the shows are structured.

Some things happen that are beyond our control and can be embarrassing. We were previewing a new STAR TREK movie before an audience with Paramount's representatives, and all the house lights came up because some jerk in a control room threw on all the lights.

I think, in general, we're open to criticism, and desperately looking for input about how to keep the shows fresh, how to come up with new angles and events that will please the crowd at large. There certainly has been a share of criticism aimed at Creation and hopefully good stuff has sunk in with us and we've made some progress on it.

GARY: I try not to let anyone leave unhappy. Sometimes you can't do that. We listen to complaints, the same as any business. A lot of times the best suggestions come from disgruntled customers. Many people don't realize that the things they want to see are the same things we would want to see, but the economic realities prevent us from doing them.

They want to see a certain guest who doesn't make appearances at all. That's not from any lack of trying on our part. They don't like the hotel the show is in — there are no other hotels in the city that will accept this kind of business. You listen to the complaint, and if it's justified, you try to fix it.

ER SPACE, THE FIFTY-FOOT WOMAN"

PAT: *What do you do outside of the Creation business?*

ADAM: When I'm not conventioneering, I'm feverishly recording original rock music of a sort, with a band I work with called Sheltered Lives. We operate out of Queens. We've been poking around with a little bit of soundtrack work and making demos for record companies, like every other rock band in America.

PAT: *Adam, you've said you're a John Byrne fan. What was your reaction to his taking over SUPERMAN?*

ADAM: Shock, disbelief. But that's the type of move John makes — sensational moves. As when he took over FANTASTIC FOUR. He has been the major influence on that book since **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** left. I have to tip my hat to Stan and Jack because, as far as I'm concerned, they rebuilt this field from the ground up. All comic books before theirs had a whole different feeling. Then Stan and Jack came in with the original Marvel in the '60s, and it was a complete rebirth of comic books. And the industry would never be the same.

Also, a quick tip of the hat to **Jim Steranko**, who is rarely seen in comics these days, but whose work on NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD I consider one of the highwater marks of comic books.

PAT: *Gary, you've said you're more of a film fan than a comics fan. What have you learned about the film business in the last 15 years?*

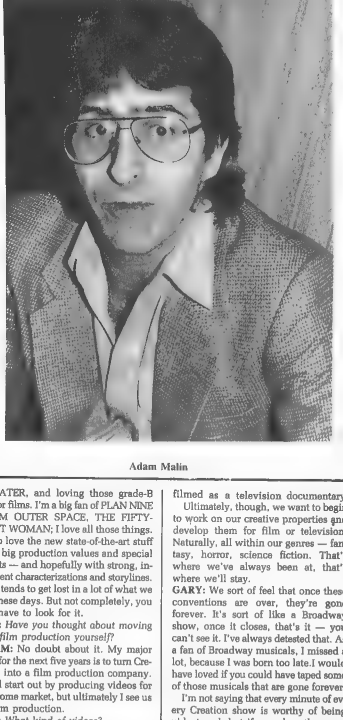
GARY: We deal mainly with the publicity end of it, so I learned an awful lot about how the companies go about publicizing their films, particularly to the direct market of fans. When we started there was none of this — hardly any conventions, and the major film producers didn't know of their existence. Now, all the majors have hired people to go around to the conventions and promote their films. That's a major change.

It's been interesting to see how they promote their films to this market; it's different from the way they handle the general public. If I wasn't running the conventions, I might try to get into the promotion business.

ADAM: The thing that's really evolved, even more than comics, is the state of science-fiction and fantasy films. Over the years, really ever since STAR WARS, it's been an amazing acceleration. Lavish, gorgeous projects, incredibly esoteric projects for very talented, creative people.

PAT: *What got you interested in film on that level?*

ADAM: I think every comic-book fan is a closet film fan. We all grew up watching **John Zacherle** and CHILLER



Adam Malin

THEATER, and loving those grade-B horror films. I'm a big fan of PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE, THE FIFTY-FOOT WOMAN; I love all those things. I also love the new state-of-the-art stuff with big production values and special effects — and hopefully with strong, intelligent characterizations and storylines. That tends to get lost in a lot of what we see these days. But not completely, you just have to look for it.

PAT: *Have you thought about moving into film production yourself?*

ADAM: No doubt about it. My major goal for the next five years is to turn Creation into a film production company. We'll start out by producing videos for the home market, but ultimately I see us in film production.

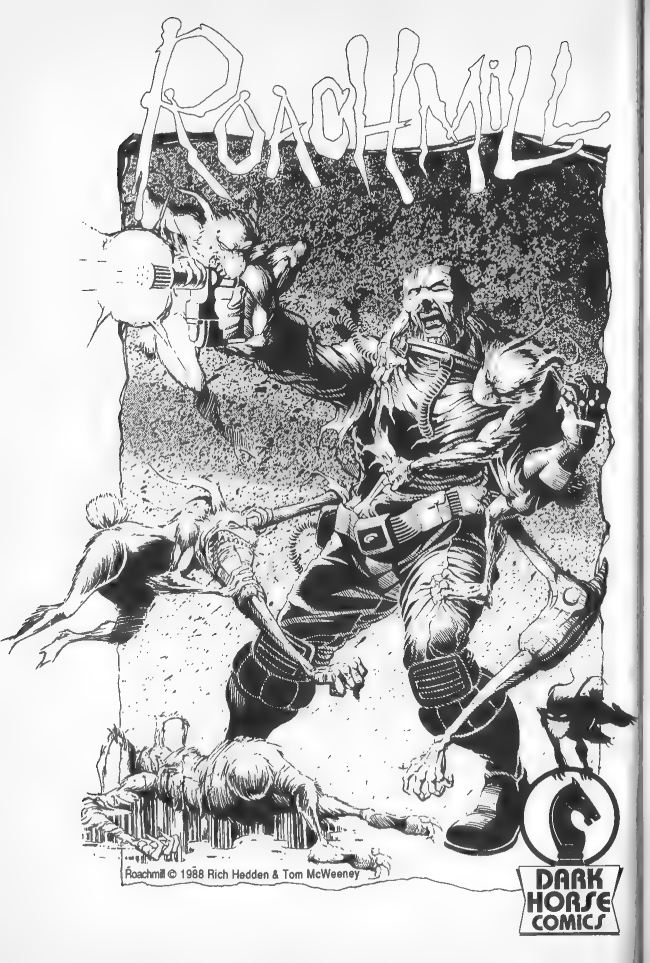
PAT: *What kind of videos?*

ADAM: Videos of our conventions, for sale to the direct fan market. And some more ambitious projects, such as our 20th anniversary salute to STAR TREK filmed as a television documentary.

Ultimately, though, we want to begin to work on our creative properties and develop them for film or television. Naturally, all within our genres — fantasy, horror, science fiction. That's where we've always been at, that's where we'll stay.

GARY: We sort of feel that once these conventions are over, they're gone forever. It's sort of like a Broadway show, once it closes, that's it — you can't see it. I've always detested that. As a fan of Broadway musicals, I missed a lot, because I was born too late. I would have loved if you could have taped some of those musicals that are gone forever.

I'm not saying that every minute of every Creation show is worthy of being videotaped, but if you chop them up, there's a lot people would be interested in. Some important guests, who made great presentations for us, have passed away.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DARK HORSE COMICS

"TSR stood for Tactical Studies Rules."

MICHAEL DOBSON

Upon first glance, Michael Dobson doesn't come off as the sort of nefarious mastermind behind such fantasy concepts as Aleshus the Wizard and the Ethengar Khanate. But the soft-spoken game director of TSR, Inc., (Dungeons & Dragons and more), must possess an amazingly active mind, because he's a chief source of imagination behind TSR's dominance in the ever-expanding role-playing game industry. Here's Mike...

MARK BORAX: *What does TSR stand for?*

MICHAEL DOBSON: Well, these days it doesn't really stand for anything. It's like TWA, it's just letters. It originally stood for Tactical Studies Rules, which in turn is an outgrowth of a little war game club called the Lake Geneva Tactical Studies Association.

MARK: *And TSR began when?*

MICHAEL: I believe in 1973. Originally it was an amateur unincorporated company that published miniatures rules for the miniatures gaming audience, and several years later they came upon this little idea they called DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, and they started off privately printed and then magic happened and it became a major phenomenon.

MARK: *So, kind of a few closely knit aficionados got together and became corporate heads?*

MICHAEL: That's right.

MARK: *And this all happened over what period of time?*

MICHAEL: It incorporated in 1974, I believe, and by '78 it was a pretty major thing.

MARK: *What's your official position?*

MICHAEL: I'm Director of Games Development, and I have some leftover marketing responsibilites because I used to be Marketing Manager. We have a New Products Development Division which consists of a Games Division, a Books Division, and a Magazines Division. Books publishes the bestselling DRAGONLANCE novels, which recently hit #8 on the NEW YORK TIMES best-seller list, and a variety of multiple plot books: ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure game books, CAR WARS books, MARVEL SUPER-HEROES game books — which are multiple ploy game books. In magazines, our

TSR's developer, Michael Dobson, shown here seconds after rejecting a proposed Dungeons & Dragons module.

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"It's harder to review a D & D adventure

top magazine, our flagship magazine, is DRAGON, which is *the* role-playing game magazine in the field. We also are the owners and publishers of AMAZING STORIES, the world's oldest science fiction magazine, DUNGEON ADVENTURES, which is an all role-playing module magazine; and POLYHEDRON, which is a newsletter for our Role-Playing Gamers Association, which is kind of like a fanzine

MARK: *But all those other things that are associated with the publications are out of your jurisdiction because —*

MICHAEL: Right.

MARK: *— you're into game planning?*

MICHAEL: Right. The games program is mine.

MARK: *Do you generate projects or do you kind of judge projects that are submitted?*

MICHAEL: Both. My division has three game designers, **David "Zeb" Cook, Doug Niles,** and **Jeff Grubb. Zeb Cook** is the lead designer for our upcoming ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS revision. **Doug Niles** is doing the new TOP SECRET espionage role-playing game, and last year won the **H.G. Wells** Award for the AD&D BATTLESYSTEM miniatures rules. **Jeff Grubb** is the designer of the MARVEL SUPER-HEROES game, Basic and Advanced sets. We're working on a couple of other interesting projects as well.

We have four game editors. **Steve Winter** is our senior editor and as far as I'm concerned he's the best technical editor in the role-playing field. We also have **Mike Breault**, who's been the editor of our bestselling DRAGONLANCE module series, **Karen Martin**, who is our Free-lance Editing Acquisitions Coordinator, and **Anne McCready**, who also has some marketing responsibilities, and was the editor for all of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS boxed sets. And I've also got **Bruce Heard,** who is the Acquisitions Coordinator, which means he buys all free-lance modules and games.

MARK: *How many people does TSR employ?*

MICHAEL: About 70 or 80 right now.

MARK: *That's big. And growing? Has it reached its stasis?*

MICHAEL: It's gonna stay the same size. We're dealing with expansion through acquisition of free-lance product.

MARK: *Rather than employee expansion?*

MICHAEL: Right.

MARK: *Where did you come in, join the ball game?*

MICHAEL: I had my third anniversary with TSR in December. Before that, for five years I had a resume writing shop in Washington D.C., a kind of a free-lance business. Before that, for five years I was with the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum, originally in the Aeronautics Department as a research assistant, and later as business manager of the planetarium.

MARK: *That's interesting. So you went from outer space to inner resumes to really outer space. (Laughter.)*

MICHAEL: Pretty much.

MARK: *How were you recruited by TSR?*

MICHAEL: I wasn't recruited, particularly. I mostly pounded on the door until they let me in. I had been in the resume business for some time, teaching other people how to find satisfying work. Resumes are a very lucrative business but they are also pretty tedious to do, day in and day out. I got very tired of it and I decided it was time to put into practice the principles that I had been teaching people for years and get myself a good job in a field I cared about. There were two places I wanted to go. One was comic books and other one was role-playing. I got an interview with **Jim Shooter** and he was very kind and very gentlemanly and said "no," and then TSR was also kind and gentlemanly and said "yes."

MARK: *What did you want to do for Jim Shooter?*

MICHAEL: I wanted to write comics.

MARK: *Did you used to be a comic-book reader?*

MICHAEL: I still am.

MARK: *So you always were?*

MICHAEL: Only since college.

MARK: *What are some of the titles you like?*

MICHAEL: Oh, I read sort of omnivorously.

than to evaluate a comic-book script."

MARK: *So there's nothing that you are particularly attached to that you can't miss. You just kind of read everything.*

MICHAEL: It changes. I've tended to follow, you know, what's been hot in the field.

MARK: *So you look at SWAMP THING when that's hot?*

MICHAEL: Right, and CEREBUS and AMERICAN FLAGG and X-MEN. You know, different things at different times.

MARK: *But you ended up with TSR instead.*

MICHAEL: Yes. When I started at TSR I was an editor in the Games Division and ended up doing some free-lance game design and module writing, and then moved into the Marketing Department at TSR and was Marketing Manager for a year, and then in March of 1986 came back as Director of the Games Division.

MARK: *Do people who bring you ideas for games, are they already within the company?*

MICHAEL: Some are and some are not. By the nature of role-playing . . . it's like if you want to break into Marvel, you don't go to **Jim Shooter** and say, "I have a great idea for a new comic book." You come in and say, "I could write great stories for SPIDER-MAN." If you want to sell games to TSR you don't come in and say, "I've got a great new role-playing game." You say, "I could write a really fantastic DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure." That's the way it works. Ideas for product come from inside the company and from outside the company. A lot of the people from the outside are mostly trying to break in as creative talent. Then it's not so much coming up with a new idea, but showing that you have the skills and talents to write, and write the kind of thing we're looking for.

MARK: *So, let's say somebody sends you a letter saying they have a great idea for DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*

MICHAEL: Actually, it goes to **Bruce Heard,** who really handles that sort of thing on a day-to-day basis.

MARK: *Okay, let's say he likes it.*

MICHAEL: If he likes it and if you are —

MARK: *This is probably what, 5%?*

MICHAEL: Pretty much . . . we've limited things. We now only consider submissions by people who have prior professional publications to their credit. Mostly tha takes care of the legions of 13-year-olds who might *one* day become very talented but don't yet have what we're looking for. If you've got a prior professional credit and —

MARK: *So your percentage rate of acceptances has probably risen?*

MICHAEL: Right, but the number of submissions we have to *consider* has dropped substantially.

MARK: *Efficient business.*

MICHAEL: It's what we have to do. It's a lot harder to review a D&D adventure than it is to, say, review and evaluate a comic-book script, or pencils. You can look at a couple of pages of pencils and you can tell whether somebody has talent. It's a lot harder to tell if somebody *really* understands how to write interactive gaming material.

MARK: *Before we continue with where it goes through the chain, could you explain what* are *some of the factors that go into evaluating that that makes it more difficult than evaluating, say, a comic book?*

MICHAEL: A DUNGEONS & DRAGONS adventure, or a role-playing adventure for any game system — whether it be TSR's or someone else's — is kind of like writing a novel in which you're not explaining what the heroes are going to do. You're just treating what are the bad guys going to do, what are the resistances the heroes will encounter in trying to solve the mystery, or deal with the adventure, to kill all of the monsters in the dungeon or whatever it is they are going to be doing. You have to make sure, *without knowing what the players are going to do,* that the adventure will be challenging, not a walk, but not automatically deadly, either. You have to make sure that you *know* the idiosyncrasies of the game system. I guess in comics . . . one of the things that's difficult in being a comic-book writer, is that you have to write and show that you can think visually. Here you have to show that you can write and that you can think interactively, that you can

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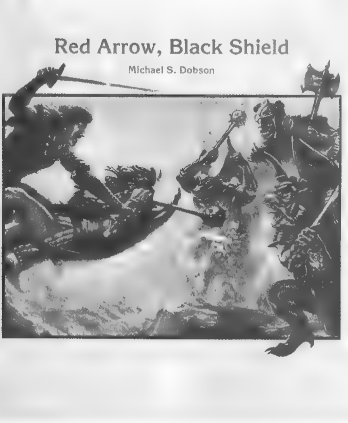

"We are one of the largest consumers

deal with doing *half* the story. The players contribute the other half of the story. You have to come up with something that will work.

MARK: *It's probably an interesting bridge you have to walk.*

MICHAEL: Right, and we're also . . . we're a much younger field than comic books. Comic books had existed for decades before the vocabulary of visual storytelling evolved completely. We're still learning. Role-playing is still a brand new field, really. It's only 12,13 years old.

MARK: *And TSR began it?*

MICHAEL: Right. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was the first thing in its field.

MARK: *And who would have guessed that DUNGEONS & DRAGONS would have gone where it did?*

MICHAEL: I don't think anybody did. *(Laughter.)* I think it came as much a surprise to the founders as it did to anybody else.

MARK: *I am sure it was a pleasant surprise.*

MICHAEL: I imagine it was.

MARK: *So, let's say that the project gets past Bruce Heard. Let's say he likes it and evaluates it and passes it along.*

MICHAEL: It would go directly then to an editor. My role is . . . I develop the schedule for the year and also administer and oversee the department. I've got very talented people and what I mostly try to do is not get in their way.

MARK: *You're like a trafficker?*

MICHAEL: Right. I write my own little modules and that takes care of my desire to be creative. I've learned to keep my nose out of everybody else's business and let *them* do their jobs.

Fritz Lieber's Gray Mouser (Opposite: Fafhrd), from TSR

MARK: *And you're still writing for the role-playing games?*

MICHAEL: Right, a little free-lance work here and there — not a lot. The product comes in to Bruce *or* one of my three in-house game designers creates it.

MARK: *And either way it still goes —*

MICHAEL: It goes from Bruce or from one of the designers into editorial.

MARK: *And by that point it's already been accepted?*

MICHAEL: Right. Bruce can accept something and the staff designers, their work is pretty much acceptable by definition. They're writing to the needs of the schedule.

MARK: *So then it goes to one of the editors.*

MICHAEL: Right.

MARK: *And how many editors are there?*

MICHAEL: We have three editors and one that coordinates free-lance editing, because we also use free-lance editors. Editing in role-playing involves not only the traditional editorial functions of making sure that everything is spelled correctly and making sure that the grammar is good — but they also get into the organization of the piece, the logic. Organization is *extremely* important in making a good role-playing adventure, because when you're a Dungeon Master and you're dealing with this adventure and your players do something, you need to find where in the text the appropriate information is, and getting it organized and getting it accessible and easy to reference in the give-and-take of a role-playing is very tough. The editor deals with the organization, deals with game mechanics — they check *all* of the statistics, they make sure that things are being handled legally in terms of the rules.

One of the big problems we have with novice designers is that they like to invent their own rules. We don't want them to invent their own rules. We want them to use the rules we've got. There are creative ways you can use those rules to get *whatever* outcome you're looking for. The systems are very versatile. But you have to deal with it *within* the system. That's called development. Some companies treat development as a step separate from editing. We put the two together.

MARK: *So the editing is the first part of your step of developing?*

MICHAEL: Well, editing and development are one process. It takes five to six weeks for a standard 32-page module, in which the person goes into *great* depths — much greater depth than, say, a book editor would go — and then they take it from its original design form into a fully publishable manuscript. It goes from there to typesetting, graphic arts, operations. We have, I think, the finest stable of fantasy artists in the world on the staff at TSR. It's certainly head-and-shoulders above anything else in the industry, as far as I'm concerned. I can't think of *any* company in any industry that has more talented artists.

MARK: *Is that all they do, your artists? Do some of your artists, also, work for a comic-book company or a book publisher or are they pretty much full-time?*

MICHAEL: They are full-time staff members. Some of them do some additional outside work. **Jeff Butler,** for example, is co-creator of THE BADGER. We also have **Larry Elmore,** who is the creator of the cartoon strip SNARF-QUEST, and he does wonderful fantasy paintings. **Keith Parkinson, Clyde Caldwell,** and **Jeff Easley** are painters, fantasy painters. Keith had a previous career as a pinball backglass artist. Clyde had done a lot of fantasy artwork, and Jeff also does some wonderful model making. We have professional cartographers. We are one of the largest consumers of mapping services in Wisconsin. Mapping is a huge part of this business.

MARK: *Are your cartographers on staff?*

MICHAEL: We have one cartographer on staff, **Dave Sutherland,** who also coor-

# of mapping services in Wisconsin."

dinates all of our outside buying. We deal with university cartographers and freelancers, such as **Dave "Diesel" LaForce.** There are people who have learned cartography because of their association with TSR.

MARK: *It's an interesting aspect of the gaming business that most readers of this magazine probably wouldn't have thought about.*

MICHAEL: Right. It's a fascinating business. I've learned a lot about it just watching these people.

MARK: *So then the editor has assigned stuff to artists —*

MICHAEL: Right.

MARK: *— and the artist draws it. It's typeset and the galleys come back, the art's finished —*

MICHAEL: Right, and then it's all keylined and sent to the printer. We do our own assembly and shrink-wrapping and then we ship it out.

MARK: *So you're saying it sometimes only takes like a four- or six-week period for all of that to happen?*

MICHAEL: Four to six weeks is the editing period. Six weeks or so is the design period. Then four to six weeks for art and pre-press.

MARK: *So, anywhere from three to six months is what it would take to go from nothing to a finished product?*

MICHAEL: Right. That's a little luckier than we'd really like to work. We're trying to build more time into the schedule, really open it up a little bit by getting the design of the project accomplished further in advance. But we can do it in much shorter amounts of time. We've done projects, start to finish, in less than a month.

MARK: *How many role-playing games is TSR currently offering?*

MICHAEL: Well, there's the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game system; the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game system, which is a different game from AD&D; MARVEL SUPER-HEROES; and the GAMMA WORLD game, that's set 500 years after the nuclear war. Those are the only ones immediately on the market. This year we're premiering the TOP SECRET game system, or rather re-premiering it — it's been substantially revised — which is an espionage and modern adventure game system. We're very excited about that. We've got a couple of secrets for next year, very nice surprises. In addition to the role-playing we also publish the SPI military simulation game line.

MARK: *What's that stand for?*

MICHAEL: Just initials, like TSR. SPI used to be a very famous war game company, Simulations Publications, Inc., a wargame and adventure game company, based in New York. We ended up acquiring their titles a few years ago. We also publish family board games. We were very successful with the ALL MY CHILDREN game. This year we did the HONEYMOONERS game; BALDERDASH, which is a really funny word game; and the BROADWAY game, which was co-created by **Mike Farrel,** who played B.J. Hunnicutt on M*A*S*H.

MARK: *What do you perceive as your role in the future? Are you happy exactly where you are?*

MICHAEL: Very happy. As far as I'm concerned, I have the best job in the adventure gaming industry. I am in *no* hurry to leave it or to move beyond it. Three or four years ago, being where I am now was my greatest fantasy, and I adore

"We're in a resort community of 5,612."

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Marvel Super-heroes.

it. It's a great job. The nice things about it for me, I have a pretty big role in helping to shape what the line is going to look like. I get as much creative challenge and reward out of helping to shape a line concept as I do from actually sitting down and doing an individual product.

MARK: *You're sculpting on a larger scale?*

MICHAEL: Right, and it's extremely exciting for me. I wake up and I'm glad to go to work, which is certainly a change from the resume business. *(Laughter.)* Resumes certainly have their challenges and I'm not sorry that I worked in that business. It's probably the most educational thing I ever did. It taught me a lot about the way the world works. People have some very strange jobs. Once I met a man who was the director of the National Strategic Mobile Homes Storage Program. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Is that for storing within mobile homes?*

MICHAEL: No, it's storing mobile homes.

MARK: *Why does that have to be strategic?*

MICHAEL: This is part of FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

MARK: *During nuclear holocaust?*

MICHAEL: Or normal disasters. If a flood wipes you out, you may under certain circumstances qualify for a loaner mobile home from the federal government, and this guy worked out detailed tables of where these mobile homes ought to be based, on military bases, all over the country, so that they're within hours of any disaster site.

MARK: *What kind of job was he looking for?*

MICHAEL: Almost anything else. *(Laughter.)* We worked at identifying "transferable skills" — this is the heart of resume writing. You look and you say what kind of skills are here: logistics, scheduling, program management — there are a lot of very general skills that you can transfer. A lot of engineering, knowledge of federal procurement regulations . . .there were a lot of things the guy could do.

MARK: *Do you work regular hours?*

MICHAEL: Yeah. Pretty much. Occasional bursts of overtime, but not on a regular basis. I'm a great believer in making sure you can do your job within the allocated 40 hours.

MARK: *What do you do on a typical day? Do you work at home?*

MICHAEL: No. I work in the office.

MARK: *Where is the office?*

MICHAEL: We're in beautiful Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, a resort community of 5,612 people on the shores of Lake Geneva, which is a nine-mile-long very pretty lake.

MARK: *I think you have a bigger population than where David Kraft — the publisher of COMICS INTERVIEW — lives, in north Georgia up in the mountains.*

MICHAEL: Where?

MARK: *He lives in Clayton, up in the Georgia panhandle. I lived there for six months, so I can understand the attraction of living in a really small, pretty place and doing a job that broadcasts all over the world.*

MICHAEL: Well, I don't live in Lake Geneva. I lived in Lake Geneva when I first moved to the area, but my wife and I moved to Waukesha, which is a suburb of Milwaukee.

MARK: *And how far is that from Lake Geneva?*

MICHAEL: About 35 minutes.

MARK: *So you get up and you drive to work, and then what do you do?*

MICHAEL: I walk in the door, check my mail and my phone messages. I usually meet with the designers and the editors and find out what's going on, talk to them about problems, talk to them about issues of line direction, brainstorm, argue about spending money. I'm very interested in long-range planning and organizational development. I spend a lot of my time trying to get things better organized.

MARK: *Do you have regular staff meetings?*

"We have water gun fights in the halls."

MICHAEL: Pretty much, 'though I try to do a lot more one-on-one meetings. I like to do a lot of planning in advance and figuring out how is the best way to use the people that I've got, how far ahead can we get. I'm a lazy man. That means I want to get things organized so there are ideally no surprises and no problems.

MARK: *You don't want to reinvent the wheel every day you go into the office?*

MICHAEL: That kind of thing annoys the hell out of me. *(Laughter.)* I do my best to avoid that.

MARK: *Is your positive attitude pretty much reflected in all of the people you work with? Is everybody there really excited and like little kids, jumping around?*

MICHAEL: All the time. We have legendary water gun fights in the halls, play with toy robots. We're a fairly immature bunch, and I love it. I mean, there are good days and there are bad days in any organization, but we have a very positive and very optimistic crew. People that are at TSR *want* to be at TSR. In the gaming industry, we're the big boys.

MARK: *How do you foresee the gaming industry in general growing or changing? What's it like now and where's it going to go?*

MICHAEL: The gaming industry, like any fads-and-fashions industry — comic books, science fiction, toys — never stays still. Things that are the hit fad one year are *not* the hit fad the next year. Like, four or five years ago, Marvel was everything and DC was nothing — and right at the moment DC is enjoying a renaissance. That's great. That will inherently not always be the case, because things will change. DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was essentially the only game in town for a long time, and that's no longer true. We're always looking for what's new, which is not to say that there isn't a whole lot of life in the old girl yet. Marvel's not about to get rid of Spider-Man just because DC is enjoying a renaissance.

We'll always be a major force in role-playing. We're always looking for what's new, what's going to be the next fad, where our line can go. In terms of marketing and distribution, one of the reasons we attend the Star*Reach trade show, and one of the reasons a lot of the game companies are starting to be in such industry shows, is that the direct sales comic-book specialty shops are a major new market for adventure gaming. We estimate that about 70% of our audience is also comic-book fans, and that means that you should be able to go to your friendly neighborhood comic-book store and you should also be able to find the adventure games in which you have an interest. That's a market we want to support and learn and help.

MARK: *So you can go into comic-book shops and find your games, too?*

MICHAEL: Right. Most comic stores do carry at least a certain amount of adventure game material, especially with the MARVEL SUPER-HEROES game and with DC HEROES, CHAMPIONS, and other superhero games. There's certainly an automatic match-up right there. We're finding that a whole lot of people who are not gamers buy our Marvel product because it provides information on their favorite superheroes.

MARK: *So people who just read comics might look at the Marvel game, even though they wouldn't typically buy a game?*

MICHAEL: Certainly, the accessories. CHILDREN OF THE ATOM, the first accessary for the MARVEL ADVANCED SET, has power details of every last mutant in the Marvel Universe!

MARK: *Is that done by your staff or by Marvel?*

MICHAEL: By ours. Marvel checks very thoroughly everything that we do, and we try to be up to date with where the Marvel Universe is at the time of publication.

MARK: *So as the comic-book industry expands the gaming industry, your outfit is probably going to expand with it to a large extent.*

MICHAEL: In terms of the direct specialty shops, that is a market that we expect to expand into — that we feel very, very strongly about. And it's nice, too, because I love gaming and I love comic books, and science fiction, and pretty much all of my personal interests mix together in this job. I'm doing what I love.

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

MERE WORDS

Dear David,

Okay, I haven't read the **George Perez** interview in #50, so why am I writing this letter? Well, I *do* want to respond to the letter by **Darrel L. Boatz** that appeared in the lettercol and given the wondrous length of the **Perez** interview, if I waited until I'd finished the entire issue — well, let's just say I wouldn't be writing this letter tomorrow in that case! So, on to my response to **Mr. Boatz...**

I continue to be amazed at how my arguments on censorship continue to be misinterpreted! I continue to be taken to task even by people who substantially agree with me (or me with them, if you prefer)! This is at least the third time I've attempted to explain my position — not changing the substance of it at all but just trying to respond to ill-conceived attacks! I don't know if this is caused by me explaining my position poorly (always a possibility!) or by others failing to understand fully what I'm trying to say — probably a bit of both. In a subject controversial and emotional as censorship there is a tendency to respond to catchwords (or presumed catchwords) and "key phrases" rather than to the underlying substance of a position, no matter how clearly stated.

Simply put, **Darrel Boatz**'s letter shows nothing except that he agrees substantially with what I said (as opposed to what he thinks I said or said I said)!

Darrel starts off with a good summary of my position and even admits to agreeing with it, at least up to a certain point. Then he says that snuff films and child pornography (my examples of two things that should be censored) "should be treated not as artforms deserving to be censored and restricted but as crimes in need of obliteration." Well, despite the fact that they are artforms (however horrible and however reluctant we may be to think of them as such), I pretty much agree with this statement and furthermore I feel that it validates my previous arguments, placing **Mr. Boatz** in substantial agreement with me! I, in fact, said that it is probably better to deal with such acts as crimes rather than things to be censored, in fact that censorship laws are inadequate to deal properly with these crimes. However (and here is where Darrel and I part company), I say that restricting these actions by criminal laws is still censorship!

Boatz seems to be saying that censorship is anything that contradicts the First Amendment. I feel that this is too narrow of a position. First, it has no applicability outside the United States and second, it is rather self-serving. By that position slander and libel cannot be censorship because they are legally mandated restrictions on free speech. (Of course, by extension, this means that any legal restriction on free speech must be acceptable. Hardly a position supportive of the right of free speech!) But I am arguing more generally and morally — what is just, not simply what is legal. I say that any restriction on free speech is censorship and thus libel and slander laws *are* censorship. But that's okay. They're just two more examples of *proper and justified* censorship.

But really, it comes down to mere words. I say that some censorship is justified while Darrel says that no censorship is justified principally because we disagree on the range of restrictions that should be denoted by the term "censorship"! I think my definition is right and — Darrel thinks his is, but that is not important for the question at hand. The point is that we seem to largely agree on what *acts* should be restricted and only disagree on whether or not these restrictions should be called censorship. (It's what I was saying before, perhaps. "Censorship" is a very emotional word and Darrel will have nothing to do with it. But he will agree to restrictions on free speech. I call those restrictions censorship — justified censorship, of course, in this case — and Darrel does not. That is the extent of our argument. Or to put it another way, I very definitely feel that we need some censorship but whether or not we need what are commonly referred to as *"censorship laws"* is another matter entirely, since a "censorship law" usually refers to some proposed law to extend censorship into areas that many of us feel to be unwarranted.)

I cannot end without responding to **Mr. Boatz**'s claim that turning off a TV set is an act of censorship. Quite simply, this is an absurd notion and in no way can be inferred from anything I have said. Darrel says that I define censorship as "any restriction of freedom of expression for whatever reason." True enough. But by turning off a TV set I am *not* restricting anyone's right or ability to *express* themselves, I am merely exercising my right of *choice*. **Boatz** is equating the right to express oneself to the "right" to be listened to, which is obviously not true. (It is censorship if it is *impossible* to listen to someone expressing themselves — for instance if the government let a TV station broadcast but modified all TV sets to not receive that channel — but it is not censorship to *choose freely* not to listen to something.) As **Boatz** says, if his TV example was true then "we would be in big trouble." But thankfully we're not — because his example is incorrect, not because my definition of censorship makes his example valid.

I sure hope this makes my position clear, at last! In other words, all you're saying is that you agree with the essence of my arguments!

"T.M. Maple"
Box 1272, Station B
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PS: David, given the rather gratuitous heading you put on **Mr. Boatz**'s letter (since I don't feel I was "felled" at all), I hope I get equal time in the sensationalist metaphor department, maybe something like "Boatz Sunk After Being Struck By Rational Tree." Hey, it was just a *thought.)*

PPS: I should also protest Darrel's implicit equating of child pornography with rape. If this were true it would simplify his arguments a bit because there are "non-censorship" laws against rape. However, I think it is clear that there are examples of child pornography that do not involve rape. (Assuming, of course, that I understand the distinction between hardcore and softcore pornography!) And then, if it is admitted that some child pornography does not involve rape, Darrel is left with the problem of how to restrict it without "censoring" it.

NOTHING MERE ABOUT WORDS

Dear T.M.,

First, let me address some minor points:

I did not agree with you up to any point except that the conclusion to be drawn from your argument, however, is faulty, so the conclusion is moot.

You are perfectly correct when you suggest that I am reluctant to consider snuff films and child pornography artforms I recognize this may be purely personal on my part, and that empirically they may satisfy the definition artform, but I consider them abominations of the term, born not of creativity but of anticreativity.

You protest my equating child pornography with rape (this was explicit!) and state that there are examples of child pornography that do not involve rape. That's news to me. I honestly haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. Still, if not rape then some criminal violation of the child must take place, and I have no reservations about protecting the child from such.

I did not claim that turning off the TV is an act of censorship, only that by *your* definition of censorship it *would* be. I would certainly agree that it isn't censorship to choose freely not to listen to or watch something or whatever, but by your definition it would be — because it would be a limitation of the audience (though only by yourself) which constitutes a limitation of the speech. By your definition everything having any affect on speech becomes censorship; it's no accident I chose the most absurd example I could think of to point this out.

And, by the way, freedom of choice is part of what freedom of speech is all about, I thought everybody knew that. It's paradoxical for you to support one and not the other.

As to the First Amendment, of course it has no application outside the United States. I never said it did. However, it is integral to my position, in that it forms the basis of how I view these matters. If this is narrow and self-serving so be it — but I can express my position in terms which I believe are applicable anywhere.

Yes, I will have nothing to do with censorship, but I do not agree with the essence of your argument, which is that there is a basis for censorship. We agree only that snuff films and child pornography are horrible and should not have the protection of the law. Otherwise I consider your position at best to be misguided and predicated on a misinterpretation of what constitutes censorship.

In essence censorship does not prohibit creation. (In practice it does, which is part of why censorship is evil, but that is separate to the issue at hand.) Quite the contrary, the censor tells the creator that he or she is absolutely free to create whatever he or she wants, but that the creation must go to the censor who will judge it and decide what can and cannot be done with it. I refuse to accept the notion — which your argument suggests — that anybody can be told it's okay to make snuff films or child pornography. To do this would be to condone the crimes which would have to be committed during the creative process, these being materials which categorically cannot be created without the commission of those crimes, and to make matters all the worse we would be condoning those crimes in advance. What is needed, rather, is a position where such materials are not at all condoned; something which removes them from consideration of the right to free speech.

I did not and would never say that any

legal restriction on free speech must be acceptable. I understand how you came to that conclusion as I did not overly deal with that aspect of my position in my previous letter. I thank you for bringing it up so that I can clear up that point. An unsupportable legal restriction on freedom of speech (or on any right), whether prohibitive or conformist (thus possibly a form of censorship), is what we must guard against.

The distinction here is in what constitutes a supportable legal restriction, which would not be censorship but rather a definition of where freedom of speech ceases to exist, and which I can best show you by example. Libel and slander laws are supportable legal restrictions on freedom and speech because those are forms of speech which are unfair and harmful to the person being libelled or slandered. Laws prohibiting the yelling of "Fire!" in a crowded theater where there is no fire are supportable because that form of speech creates a dangerous environment, one in which life can be lost, from an otherwise safe environment. Laws against snuff films and child pornography would, in my opinion, be supportable, for obvious reasons. However, this is not to say that just any law against snuff films and child pornography would be. It is entirely possible that a law could, while combatting snuff films and child pornography, encompass unsupportable legal restrictions. There are legal restrictions on freedom of speech which I feel are unsupportable, such as the obscenity laws, and I oppose them.

What it all boils down to is rights. Specifically, I believe that rights exist as absolute precepts; which is to say that where they exist they exist absolutely, without qualification or restriction. Further, I recognize that there are places where a right will come into conflict with another right, or even with itself. I view this as a definition of where a right ceases to exist, one or the other, perhaps both. I further recognize that these conflicts can only be decided on a case-by-case basis.

In the instances which you have cited the conflict exists between the right of freedom of speech and the right not to be criminally violated, as it were, and to my way of thinking this defines a place where the right of freedom of speech ceases to exist. Freedom of speech, while not encompassing snuff films or child pornography, still exists absolutely where it exists. The censorship position, on the other hand, is that the right of free speech does not exist absolutely where it exists, and that it encompasses forms of speech which violate rights which in the consideration of a conflict hold a position of supremacy to the right of free speech — in effect that the right of freedom of speech is false and immoral — and that is a blatantly hypocritical and untenable position. In other words, there is no such beast as "proper and justified censorship," that is a contradiction of terms. Censorship is unacceptable.

Finally, as before, let me here state that I am not an authority on the law or the Constitution (or the British North America Act), these are simply my interpretations of the facts as I see them. I am more than willing to hear opposing or supportive arguments (in fact I invite them). And gee, it's really kinda nice here on the bottom of the sea.

(P.S. There's nothing mere about words.)

Darrel L. Boatz
416 W. Woodbury
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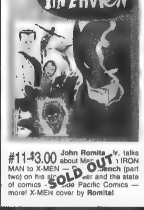

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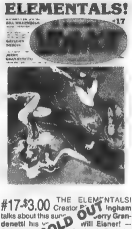

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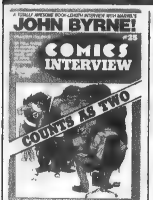

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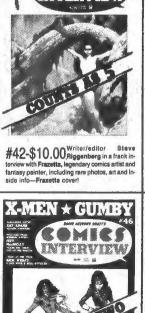

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